WILDWOOD CHIMES

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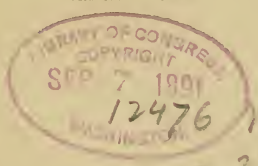
WILDWOOD CHIMES

BY

EMMA WITHERS

"Whom the gods love dwell with nature."

HELEN HUNT JACKSON.



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TO MY DEAR BROTHER,

J. S. WITHERS,

IN MEMORY OF OUR CHILDHOOD DAYS, WHEN I FOLLOWED HIS FOOTSTEPS OVER THE WEST VIRGINIA HILLS, THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED.

E. W.

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WILDWOOD CHIMES.

WILDWOOD CHIMES.

THE SONGS OF LIFE.

OFTEN we heard, my heart and I,
The songs of Life, and oft did try

To find the singer where she lay
In moonlit roses of the May,

Or 'mid the sheltered buds that lie
In sylvan haunts of Arcady.

We felt her silken tresses oft
Trail on the breezes, low and soft,

And heard her foot-falls, light and low,
Like honey-seekers, come and go.

But ever there the search did fail.
"*Beyond the veil, beyond the veil,*"

Her haunting whisper seemed to say;
But never could we find the way.

Still sad or gay, or far or near,
Her changeful melodies we hear.

Sometimes the plaintive notes are borne
Upon the wild bee's silver horn ;

Again, in numbers soft they sigh
Across the fields of yellow rye.

Upon the hum of growing things
The mystery forever rings,

Whose meaning all too deep doth lie.
Yet we have learned, my heart and I,

The minor chords of many a lay
The unseen singer of the May

Sung 'mid the roses long ago.
All incomplete and faint and low

The broken notes, fit for the ear
Of him alone who loves to hear

The hush of waves against a shore
That twilight shrouds forevermore.

A WEST VIRGINIA GRAVE.

ABOVE the sheltered valley homes, far off
Upon the mountain top there lies a grave,
And human eye looks not upon the lone,
Still splendor of that sepulcher, save when
Some hunter stays his wandering steps to scan
With curious eye, the cairn, rude, coffin-shaped
And gray, o'ergrown with shrubs, and closely clasped
With twining ivies which the thoughtful years
Have wreathed among the stones. Above the name,
If ever name thereon was writ, moss waves
Long since have rolled. Yet some there are who still
The broken memories of his story keep.
A lad who at the first wild war-notes left
His home beyond, and crossed these rugged heights
To wear the gray most gallantly, in vain.
As year on year, the unequal conflict raged,
Thoughts of his home within the orchard bowers,
And the dear faces, long unseen, within
His bosom grew to desperate resolve.
A week of journeying by lonely nights,
His only guides the faintly gleaming stars,
The whistling bullet of the hidden foe,
And then—he passed from sight forevermore.
Yet lacks he not sweet ministries of love;
Weird elegies in quaint, memorial lines

The many-fingered lichens o'er him trace;
Here, in this cleft, her blue eyes full of tears,
The iris waves; and in her trembling hand
The columbine holds out her rosy bells
Like lamps before a shrine; while round him stand
In dark unbending pride, the druid trees.
Here in the twilight comes the whip-poor-will,
And 'neath the midnight moon the yellow owl
Pours out her melancholy wail. And here
Unharmed the lizard suns his emerald sides,
The mountain-cat leads forth her tawny young.
What better lot than his?—to turn aside
With all life's possibilities untried,
In the full vigor of his youthful prime,
While fair Achievement waved her beckoning hand,
And on the crystal heights of fame, undimmed
Her radiant watch-lights shone, while 'round him sung
The silver-throated voices of the dawn,—
Within this grand cathedral hall, beneath
The pillared oaks, and ever-changing skies,
To lose existence? Nay; but to become
A part of bud and leaf, of wind and wave;
To murmur in the pine tree's fragrant hair,
And through the veins of the primeval oaks
Into the sunshine warm again to creep.
To join the anthem of the solemn woods:
"Fear not; lie down with us, O, child of Earth.
In this calm faith, all shall be well."

TO-DAY.

O, SOUL, why sitteth thou so long
Beside a dead past making moan?
Why wring thy pallid hands and cry:
"Too late!" Is not to-day thine own?

Thy harvest fields of life are bare,
No wealth of ripened grain thou hast.
Thine idle hands were folded close
Until the sowing-time was past.

But glean among another's sheaves,
And starve not for thine early sin—
A hired hand within his fields,
Another's harvest gather in.

Too late, indeed, for thee to build
The structure of thy visions sweet;
Yet thou with helpful hands mayst toil
Another's labor to complete.

Too late! Thy myrtle branches lie
All withered by the north wind's hate;
Yet thou the nettles mayst destroy
Which grow within another's gate.

The golden sun of hope fulfilled
Is hidden from thy sky away;
Yet light serene and fair still lies
Upon the pathway of to-day.

THE LADY-SLIPPER.

THE morning is before me as I write—
A day in June within the school I taught
In Nomansland. The log-house, low and brown,
Stands in a woody hollow. Close behind
It climbs a hill, so close, the squirrels leap
From the low, birchen boughs upon the roof,
And chatter in the early dawn. In front
A streamlet where the water-fairies sing
Their wordless songs the livelong day. How oft
The haunting shadows of my life have fled
From the low music of that mountain rill.
And just beyond the stream, another height
Conglomerate, of rock and tree, of ferns,
And mossy greenness of the creeping plants
That cling about the base of shelt'ring cliffs.
Upon those cliffs the glossy laurel held
Its pink-rimmed cups o'erfilled with honey-dew;
While high above the sturdy oak-trees bore
A colony of nesting crows that seemed
With shrill, sarcastic laughter oft to mock

The dreamful hours which glided by like strange
Sweet flowers that bloom and fade and bear no fruit.
A fit and chosen haunt it was for all
The shy, soft-footed children of the woods;
And I, long careless grown of frown or smile—
The caprice of a moment rules them both—
Took rare delight in the bold confidence
That twinkled in the round, dark eyes of some
Brown-striped and furry creature of the hills
That claimed a morning greeting at my door.

Within, were benches most grotesquely planned;
A score of hardy lads and lassies—such
As all along the common walks of life
Spring up like ill-trained weeds that might have grown
Beneath propitious skies to fairest flowers.
A water-bucket filled with gold and green
Of ferns and wild azalias from the cliff;
A lizard basking on the window-sill;
And I, presiding genius of the hour.
There came a splash within the rill, a pause,
A shadow on the step, and lo, beside
Me stood, with dripping feet and cheeks aglow,
A lint-haired urchin clad in home-spun blue,
Whose deep, capacious pockets yawned with rolls
Of sappy birch and tender wintergreen.
One grimy hand an open jack-knife clasped,
Still redolent with odors of the feast,
The other held a dewy blossom poised
Like a pink bird upon its slender stem.

"I picked it for you, Teacher." Artful boy!
With this magician's wand to turn the tide
Of a just chiding for his loiterings,
And 'scape in peace.

O, men of wisdom, still
A cumb'rous name of learned length attach
To this most fragile blossom of the wild.
In heart of me, and verse of mine, it lives,
For aye, a lady-slipper, breathing yet
The subtile fragrance of enchanted woods.
Upon the odors of the cool, black mold
A fairy picture of the long ago
Arose, and loudly elfin voices called
My soul. Upon a slaty ridge I saw
A barefoot child, in rustic dress, with waves
Of sunburnt hair adrift upon the wind,
Alone with the calm beauty of the fresh-leaved June.
All in the yellow light the hilltops lay;
But 'round their base the purple shadows crept
And darkened, as she stood with bended head,
Still as the lichen on the rain-scarred rock
Beneath her feet, and listened to the sounds
That rose above the murmur of her heart.
Along deep hollows fled the haunted stream
Pursued by its wild longing for the sea;
And with its plaintive purl, at intervals,
The tinkle of a bell, afar and faint,
Proclaimed her quest, the cows, flank-deep
In fragrant herbage of the fertile hills,

By slow-descending paths were winding down
The homeward way to the cool water-brooks,
To rest them there with meditative eyes,
And deep-breathed satisfaction, in the dusk.
Avoiding the worn ways of smooth descent,
From cliff to cliff the fearless seeker dropped;
For rock and shrub and vine were faithful each
To foot and hand. She heard the captive winds
In somber hemlocks faintly moan, and felt
Their od'rous fingers stir her loosened hair;
And then waist-deep in ferns and clinging vines
Of the wild pea, she plunged, and knew no pause,
Save, now and then, to pluck from its deep bed
Of mold, this shyest beauty of the woods—
This scented slipper of the Elfin Queen,
Then homeward, in the gloaming hastened on.
O, prophecies, unread, how could I know—
For this was I—that evermore my heart
The brook's wild longing and the wind's unrest
Would echo still? and all my treasures prove
But fairy gold dissolving at the touch
Of life's realities? How read the weird
Inscribed by destiny against my birth:
"Thou art a child of earth; and deep within
Thy nature live the mysteries of all
Her sheen and shadows. Rock and wind and wave
Thy brethren are; and when to other sight
And sound, thine eyes are closed and lips are dumb,
These kindred voices of the Universe
Shall find an echo still within thy soul."

SILENT CITIES.

UPON gentle hills are lying
Many cities, still and lone,
The swift birds above them flying,
Hear no voices save their own.
From them issues no one telling
The sad knockers, rich or poor,
"Mistress waits within her dwelling,
Enter;" opening wide the door.

They have plats of grass and roses,
Myrtle leaves, forget-me-nots;
There, in lowly grace, reposes
Springtime, near the smallest cots;
But no busy childish fingers
Press the tinted petals there,
Childish laughter never lingers
Like sweet incense on the air.

Yet, their faces turning thither,
Life's fair morning saw them pass
Ere the flowers began to wither,
Ere the dew had left the grass.
Saw them pass in silence dreary
Followed close by tears and sighs,
Folded were their hands, and weary
Shadows gathered in their eyes.

There are harps of willows olden
Strung with shadows, soft and long,
But no voice awakes the golden
Echoes of the land of song.
Oft, when o'er the glad earth sighing
Come faint whispers of the spring
The sad ring-dove, swiftly flying,
Sweeps them with her silver wing.

Often when the time moves slowly,
Clogged and heavy with our fears,
To those cities, calm and holy,
Look we through our blinding tears.
Ah, those cities! faintly gleaming,
In the starlight clear and fair,
Broken was our peaceful dreaming,
When our loved ones journeyed there.

And, though we should call forever,
Never comes an answering tone,
Only sad winds murmur, "Never,"
Sweeping past with restless moan.
"Never—never," we have heard it
When the days were long and bright,
And the sobbing rain has stirred it
Falling slowly in the night.

Have they left their crowded alleys
For the mountain heights sublime?
For the breadth of peaceful valleys
Safe beyond the surge of time?

Dipped their robes in crystal rivers,
Washing from them every stain?
Do they rest where softly quivers
From each spray a golden strain?

This we know not, can not reckon,
Yet when day grows dusk and chill,
Spirit fingers seem to beckon
To those cities on the hill.
And we know a shadow lying
Down the life-road ever waits,
To each weary pilgrim crying:
"Enter; rest within their gates."

AT SWITHIN'S RUN.

I.

THE WALK.

THE work-day life lies far away,
And in the dawning of the day
Along the pathway by the Run,
Whose course goes onward with the sun,
Is spread the web of fancy gay
Beneath the feet which pass that way.
Wild winds have swept the woodland clear
Of summer charms, yet life is here.

In beds of softest russet spread
The dry leaves rustle to the tread
    Of shy, soft-footed things that love
    The freedom of a mountain cove.
And close beside a hidden spring
Wherein the water-spirits sing,
    All sheltered warm beneath the hill
    The maiden-hair is waving still.
And the brown earth beneath the feet
Resounds with echoes low and sweet.
    From throbbing heart of life sublime
    The currents well with rhythmic chime;
They tune the wild bird's mellow glee,
And swell the veins of meanest tree.
    And he who listens now may hear
    The springtime whispers in his ear.
The work-day life lies far away,
And fancy rules the dawn of day.

II.

THE VISITORS.

The bell had rung; and up the criss-cross logs
Which duty did for steps, a scrambling host
Of urchins came whose variegated heads
Were busied soon o'er book and slate; and scarce
Had silence fallen when their came a rap
So deep, so loud, of such aggressive length
The very stones in the foundation heard.
And following it into the room there came

With heavy tread and features grimly set
With the importance of a mission high,
Three hardy followers of the plow, with locks
Unkempt and grizzly beard unshorn
And homespun wamus knotted at each waist.
With kindly greeting the schoolmistress bade
Them enter and be seated, wond'ring still
Why such scant courtesy her words repaid,
And what the purpose of the dismal three.
Too brief the problem long to vex her soul;
"Them's the trustees," the echo softly crept
Among the tilted benches, and a show
Of diligence fell on the knowing ones.
"Yes, *Sir!* I heard Bill Underly tell Pap,
Las' night, they wuz a-comin' down to give
The teacher Hail Columby somethin' 'bout
Wastin' such lots o' chalk, and sparkin' of"—
Here sharply called the recitation bell,
And the stage whispers of the "Primers" ceased.
The hours fled and still the men of fate
Took silent cognizance of all that passed,
Followed the shifting classes in their work,
And hung upon each question and reply
In silence, till the mighty hill had thrown
Its shadow vast and deep across the wastes
Of fragrant pennyroyal; then with brief
And grave-voiced conference among themselves,
Arose and still in silence gained the door
Where they a moment stood shuffling their feet
Uneasily, and then the eldest turned

And combing out his beard with nervous hand,
Like one whose conscience pricks him to a task
Unwelcome most, looked down into the eyes
Of questioning laughter raised to his and said:
"The law makes it our dooty to inspect
This school; an' havin' nothin' else to do,
Pertickiler, to-day, we've come to see
Ef you wuz goin' a'cordin' to the law.
The gal that kept last winter give a sight
More time to sparkin' than to spellin', so
We had not 'lowed to hire a gal agin;
But all the boys who are high l'arnt enough
To teach in town have got too big to come
So fur up on the Run; an' so we done
The best we could by takin' you. W–e–ll, n–o,—
There ain't ben no complaint, pertickiler,
Agin' the school, exceptin' there wuz talk
Down at the mill about that young town chap
Hitchin' his critter to the school-house steps
As much as twict sence Christmas. Brother, hey?
Now, Lizy Ann allowed you favored some.
So there's an end o' that. I 'm pow'ful glad.
Sparkin' 'll ruin any school alive.
W–e–ll, y–e–s, some little talkin' has ben done
Concernin' your odd way o' teachin' chaps
To read an' write before they've l'arnt to spell
In double sittables; an' some do say
That you don't teach the alphybet a-tall.
O' course we don't believe sech stuff as that,
For when I heard them little fellers there

A-readin' their Fu'st Readers right along—
An' po'try, too—an' never skip a word,
I reckoned that you know what you're about.
About that chalk? O, that was jest some word
We had from the young man in Johnses store;
He thought you must be wastin' lots o' chalk.
An' Squire Moss—he's Pres'dent o' the Board—
Said how, as guardeens o' the school, that we
Had better jest step in an' let you know
The deestrick only furnishes one box.
The regeler amount last winter wuz
Two sticks a week; an' most of it wuz left
Kickin' about the house when school wuz out.
But when I see them little fellers go
Up to yan board an' chalk their lessons down
In real good writin' letters, sech as I
Wuz never l'arnt to make, as boy or man,
I see there is some good in usin' chalk;
An' ef the deestrick jumps the bill, I'll pay.
We're not a-findin' any fault of you,
You're doin' purty well, considerin;
An' we stand by the teacher when we kin.
But use the spellers jest a little more;
An' ef you should have any difficult
Enforcin' discerpline,—for there be some
Real heady chaps upon the Run—or want
Advice about the runnin' of the school,
You kin depend on us. Jest call on us."

III.

AT NIGHT.

The weary day was with the past—
Down from the hill-tops swept the blast;
  It whistled through the branches bare
  And tossed the pine tree's fragrant hair.
But to the watcher by the fire
The triumph of a strong desire
  Through all its choral changes rung,
  And ever through the songs it sung
An old sweet glamour seemed to thrill.
This was the world of fancy still;
  For gracious embers ne'er deny
  The quest of wistful dreamer's eye,
Nor show the witching forms they raise
Unto another's mocking gaze.
  And in the hollow land of flame
  Uprose the royal towers of fame;
And gallant hosts came marching by
On the fair plains of reverie.
  No knight e'er graced the Table Round
  As brave as he whose bugle sound
Awoke those lists with challenge free
To deeds of noblest chivalry.
  Lancelot was he, but without stain;
  More courtly than the gay Gawain;
Than Galahad more pure and white
He stood, her dream-created knight;

And while the night-winds wrought their will,
Her thoughts went on to Camelot still.
Unheeding all the jar and fret
In fancy's world she lingered yet.

UNCROWNED.

YES, pause where the heroes are sleeping
And garland their graves with the best
The summer-time holds in her keeping;
Well-won are the wreaths on each breast—
Well-won are the song and the story
That honor the brave and the true;
And long may the incense of glory
Encircle the Gray and the Blue.

But when with the battle-flags trailing,
With war's thrilling requiems said,
You pass with the drums' muffled wailing
From the myrtle-paved streets of the dead,
I know that in by-ways forsaken,
Where only the wind's hollow sound
The desolate silences waken
The bravest are lying uncrowned;

Who walked in the ways that were narrow,
  Who trod the world's wine-press alone,
Who drank from the waters of Marah,
  With anguish too deep for a moan.
But low in Gethsemane kneeling
  The depths of their spirits were stirred
For the world, and the fountains of healing
  Gushed forth like the song of a bird.

And weary ones, thirsting no longer
  Their hearts on His promise did lean,
And the pulses of life grew stronger
  At the touch of the Christ unseen.
But only the angels of pity
  Heard ever the breath of a word,
As they wept by the Gates of the City:
  "*Thou knowest, Thou knowest, O Lord!*"

Ah! Fame, do thy laurel-wreathed pages
  Know aught of the hallowed place
That softens the rime of the ages—
  Though nameless forever its grace—
Where worn with the fever of living,
  Yet true unto death to its trust,
And spent with the unreturned giving
  A woman's heart crumbled to dust?

NATURE.

Rondeau.

I SOUGHT within men's hollow creeds
A healing for the sorest needs
That vexed my life.—They mocked my quest;
The hidden fires within my breast
Burned on. I sought the sylvan meads,
I watched the flight of wingéd seeds,
I found the soul in meanest weeds,
I saw young birds from out the nest
On swift wings soar.
I follow Nature where she leads,
And naught to me are men and deeds;
For in the pathway she hath pressed
I find the benison of rest—
And safe from life's tormenting greeds,
I seek no more.

THE BROKEN ALPHABET.

IF you should care to follow me
Along the lanes of memory,
I'd have you pause beside the spot
Where stood—though now it standeth not—

A log-house, little, brown and cool,
Which half a narrow space did fill
Between the road-side and the hill;
And standing there, I'd show to you
A picture, homely, quaint and true—
The place where first I went to school.
The door on wooden hinges hung
That shrieked, however lightly swung;
The backless benches on four legs,
The narrow shelf upon its pegs,
On which the dinner baskets stood;
Six tiny panes of wizard glass
Through which we viewed strange monsters pass,
Distorted shapes of man and beast—
Each one a dozen, at the least,
Oft-time went glimmering through the wood.
How oft my errant eyes forsook
The ancient blue-backed spelling-book,
Where, like a hideous array
Of dragons, frowned the livelong day
The pond'rous names of nothingness,
Whose syllables I stumbled o'er
When called to stand upon the floor;
The laughing-stock of all at once,
A yellow-headed little dunce,
Trembling with envious distress.
For they their "*One I, one*" could say,
And glibly name the long array
Of numeral letters, fair and good,
Till "*M, one thousand,*" proudly stood;

While I, who loved all things alive,
Could count the sparrow's speckled eggs,
The rings upon the spider's legs,
How many straws the peewees laid
Each day upon the nest they made,
But could not see how *V* was five.
O, blessed power to forget
The ills of life, its jar and fret!
For memory a golden haze
Has wrapped about those early days,
And clasped it with her jeweled hand.
Nameless, for aye, the games we played
At noon beneath the beech-tree's shade;
The melody forever mute
We made upon each rustic flute
At rest upon the yellow sand.
The mold is deep upon the shore
Beneath the painted sycamore,
Above the clover-babies white
That in the mellow, checkered light
We hushed to sleep in robes of gold.
Merlin, himself, might search in vain
For echo of the merry train
That pierced the forest's secret core,
And feasted on its rifled store;
Yet memory doth it all enfold.
Through many a lengthened afternoon
My drowsy senses learned the tune
Of blackbird in the willow tree,
Of cricket, and of droning bee.

I watched as in a tranquil dream,
Through open door, the muskrat sleek
Go paddling down the narrow creek,
And vanish in his chamber dank
And chill beneath the shelving bank,
Secure 'gainst school-boy's boldest scheme;
Or, following the circling light
Above the hills' uneven height,
I planned to climb the highest rock,
And catch the cloud-man's fleecy flock
That swept across the pasture blue.
Ah, many a fancy's spangled train
Was netted in my childish brain;
And though an idler's name I earned,
Thrice happy were the days I learned
The runes of nature, wise and true.
Invisible the teacher grand
Who led me with a gentle hand;
Her alphabet was lettered o'er
Each blade and leaf, and precious lore
She wrote upon the wind and wave;
Within my formless musings crept,
And wrought in visions while I slept.
Thrice happy had I followed still
The mandate of her gracious will,
And claimed the promises she gave.
But in the after years, I turned
To other paths, and dimly burned
Her sacred lamp, and seemed to fail
Behind a swiftly-closing veil,

And to her lore I lost the clue;
Yet, here and there the years still bring
The letters of a broken ring;
I find them in the tempest wild,
And in the laughter of a child,
And in the wood notes clear and true;
At dawn, beneath the frozen hill,
Above the waters of the rill,
Engraven on a page of ice
The characters of strange device
Half-hidden in the frost leaves shine;
While soft and low the waters tell
The syllables of some sweet spell,
Some mystery of secret power
Revealed to earth in that charmed hour,
Whose meaning I may half divine;
And on a silvery birchen root,
The impress of a naked foot,
Or print of finger in the glow
The orchid's inner petals show,
My half-anointed eyes can trace.
Or, following the slanting ray
Of summer's fairest, longest day,
Through dim cathedral aisles of pine,
The incense from a viewless shrine
Enfolds me with a sacred grace.
Exquisite tones my pulses thrill:
"Hail, happy mortal who dost still
With steadfast heart and vision true,
The promises of Life pursue—

Lo, just beyond, her gates appear!"
And, somewhere, in a fairer land,
Within a clearer dawn I'll stand
With all the letters, strange and sweet,
Of that lost alphabet complete—
Beyond the vapors rolling here.

IF.

IF, toiling in the dreary mine,
I chanced to find a tiny stone,
And with its fitful sparkle pleased,
I clasped and called it all my own,
Would he who quenched the feeble spark,
Be richer now that it is dark?

If in the desert sands I found
A simple, bloomless, little weed,
And in its homely leaves should find
A healing for my sorest need,
Would he be wiser who should say
I'd better cast that weed away?

If in the mighty choir of life
My faint heart learned a little song,

And sung it softly, o'er and o'er,
Until its heated pulse grew strong,
Would he be greater who should say
My song is but an idle lay?

BECAUSE OF HIS LOVE.

O WONDERFUL earth, in thy bosom so deep
The beautiful springtime lieth asleep
With her pulses of incense fluttering low
Under the drifts of the pitiless snow,
All sheltered and safe from the wild wind's sweep,
Because of His love, God hath willed it so.

O, merciful grave, in thy haven of rest
The weary ones lie, with their pale hands pressed
To bosoms too still for the passionate pain
Of living and loving to pierce them again;
Because of His love—and he knoweth best—
The voices of longing entreat them in vain.

CASTLES OF HOPE.

THE last wave of sunlight has drifted away,
But a soft glory dawns over valley and slope,
A splendor unknown to the earth, air, or sea,
And it shines from the wonderful castles of Hope.

On the far-away isles of a magical sea
Their white towers float upon billows of gold;
And the rainbows of promise around them are spread,
While the spirits of silence the portals unfold.

There are faces more fair than the pale silver light
That gleams from the bow of a fast-waning moon,
And the voices are softer than rain in the night
When it falls on the petals of roses in June.

There is music as sweet as the yellow-bird's song
In the islands where summer has folded her wings;
For the harps are all strung with our heart-hidden dreams,
And a soul's immortality touches the strings.

Ah! what does it matter? the night closing in
On a harvest of nothing but ruin and rust.
And the cry of a desolate past for the joys
That are buried forever in ashes and dust?

For a shallop of lilies, far whiter than day,
Comes over the waves of the glittering sea;

And a sweet voice is singing somewhere in the night,
"The wish that is dearest is coming to thee."

So in patience we wait, though the hours are long,
Their darkness is lost in the roseate flame
That hides the fair hope from our eyes, but each heart,
In its holy of holies, has whispered its name.

And, O, when we stand by the river so cold,
While the glorious sunlight is fading for aye,
And the shadowy wings of the Messenger sweep
The warm, living earth from our vision away;

When the last thrilling tones of the voices we loved
In the days that were washed in the fountains of dawn,
Grow faint as the wail of a wind-stricken lute,
And the last tender touch from our faces is gone,—

When the trembling soul in its prison of clay
With the terrors of darkness despairing shall cope,
Ah, bright be the glow of the unfailing light
That shines from our beautiful castles of Hope.

MIDSUMMER DAYS.

WHEN shining days grow warm and long
And leaves in full-grown beauty glow,
I leave the care-tormented throng
And forth into the woodland go.
I lose the din of idle words
In soulful music of the birds,
And the wind's whispers soft and low.

Across the ring where fairies slept
The green moss creeps in shady dells;
A diamond tear by darkness wept,
Within each jeweled chalice dwells.
A welcome-song attuned for me
In notes of sweetest minstrelsy,
Upon the wind harp softly swells.

Here on a rock, rain-scarred and gray,
For hours I watch the shadows sweep;
They chase life's vain regrets away,
And soothe its weariness to sleep.
I hear the faint breeze in its lair
Amid the pine tree's spicy hair,
In the still gloaming wake and weep.

Or seated in some python vine,
I swing beside a mountain stream,

And freight the ships of fancy's line
With flowers of many a cherished dream,
In silence, restful, sweet and lone,
Unstirred save by the wave's low tone,
And by the distant hawk's shrill scream.

While wafted by each swaying leaf,
A fitful breath of hidden flowers
Memorial brings of fragrance brief
That hung upon spring's opening hours;
And somewhere near, I know full well,
A few wood-violets still dwell
Beneath the forest's coolest bowers.

O, summer days, celestial down
From Time's half-resting pinions shed,
With all your royal splendor crown
The hour when with the dreamless dead,
Within some quiet vale at rest,
Beneath its fringéd mantle pressed,
I lay with all my prayers said.

Where in the silence, dim, divine,
The timid children of the wood
Will break the shadows' drifting line
With antic freak and playful mood;
Where whispered requiems will thrill
The sighing trees, and softly fill
The heart of that rapt solitude.

ST. VALENTINE.

IT comes to me as the winds chime—
A scrap of half-forgotten rhyme,
The fragment of a childish lore
Once caught, almost unconsciously,
From pages read by man no more,
Save by the light of memory—
The tale that claims this verse of mine,
This legend of St. Valentine.

At twilight in the harbor wide,
His ship was waiting for the tide,
The tide that all too swiftly came;
For years, alas! must roll between,
And changing seasons light their flame—
Long seasons with their clouds and sheen.
Across the dark, estranging brine
He went who was her Valentine.

A year. Still far beyond her port
The good ship sailed, of winds the sport;
And to the watcher by the shore
There came but this, a simple line.
Her pulses sang it o'er and o'er,
It thrilled them like enchanted wine.
"Sweetheart," it said, "thy hope is mine,
And I am still thy Valentine."

But freighted still with hopes or gold,
With all the treasures that men hold,
Ships will go down, and hearts will break.
Well no; still hear this legend's idle lay:
At twilight when the tides awake,
He called her and she could not stay;
But passed beyond earth's harbor line
The evening of St. Valentine.

Who from the grape its bloom would brush,
Or rob the sunrise of its flush?
Who pluck the mirage from the cloud,
Or from the morning take its dew?
Then be this idle rhyme allowed,
Though it be neither great nor true.
"Sweetheart," it says, "thy hope is mine,
And I am still thy Valentine."

IN DREAMS.

LAST night the pattering rain came down
With gentle murmur on the roof,
And hushed to sleep in changeful dreams
Long years of checkered warp and woof.

I know not if within its voice
The ghost of soft remembrance crept;

But some sweet spirit claimed the night,
And lingered near me while I slept.

Methought I stood upon a knoll
That edged a flowing rivulet,
Within whose whispering waters all
The melodies of spring were met.

And there was all within that scene
To charm a poet's dreaming soul;
An artist there might deem that he
Had reached his aspiration's goal.

On either side the mountain smiled
With bursting buds and tender sprays,
And from them many a silver voice
Trilled out its joy in gladsome lays.

There many a slender birch looked down
On blossoms strange as fancy's dream,
And spirit bells swayed noiselessly
From mossy rocks above the stream.

The wind crept in and opened wide
The windows of that living wall,
Through which the dying sunlight cast
Its golden pebbles over all.

The wind crept in and softly swayed
The scented grasses to and fro,

And time seemed pausing by that stream
Lulled by its music sweet and low.

"Here," said I to my weary soul,
Tempted and tried and sorely pressed,
"Safe from the ceaseless whirl of strife
In this dim solitude is rest.

No sordid care, no fevered thirst
To mar, to madden every hour,
But days which glide like tranquil dreams
Rife with the fragrance of each flower.

And here to find the utterance
In the sad voices of this stream,
Of that tumultuous tide of thought
That wears the heart, unheard, unseen.

To read with that mysterious sense
We call the vision of the soul,
Long pages of immortal truth
Inscribed on nature's living scroll."

Upon a drift of scented leaves
I sank, half-buried there to lie,
And thought—'t was but a dream, you know—
I'd let the toiling world go by.

A soft narcotic fragrance wrought
Its subtle spell upon my brain,
And life and its remembrance seemed
The echo of a lost refrain.

The murmur of the stream grew faint;
The woodland seemed to drift away;
And wrapped in misty realms of space,
Dreaming within a dream I lay.

Before me rolled a mighty stream,
And, borne upon its waveless breast,
A mystic branch of mistletoe
Went floating toward the dying West.

Upon it sat a scarlet bird,
A golden harp beneath its feet,
A harp whereon the zephyrs played
Low music, sad and soft and sweet.

From shining shore to shining shore,
The flitting rainbows flashed and played,
Flung from the plumage of the bird
That floated on through light and shade.

The bright bird sang, and with the harp
Its notes grew clearer, yet more low,
And finer, farther, fainter still,
Amid the river's gleam and glow.

But only he who dreams may hear
The haunting sweetness of the song
That fluted from its ruby throat
Like a life-current, swift and strong.

One thought within my being stirred
And scorched my veins like heated wine:

"I'll follow till the world be past,
Sweet singer, till I call thee mine."

But still that subtile fragrance wrought
Its mystery upon my brain,
I saw the mighty current bear
Its burden onward to the main.

And still like one bereft of life
Reclined on that enchanted bed;
The song, the light, the stream rolled by;
The dream within my dream was dead.

The woodland, too, was gone, and wreaths
Of asphodel, fresh-blown and white,
About me lay serene and fair
And gleaming in the starry night.

Above my burning eyes they lay,
By unseen fingers softly pressed,
And gentle whispers round me said:
"The song was frenzy, this is rest."

Without, the tossing waves of life
Again were beating on the shore,
All turbulent with pain and strife,
The night was dead, my dream no more.

LIFE.

A CHECKERED web of flying years
Of mingled doubting hopes and fears,
With here and there a golden thread,
Like sunshine through the darkness spread.

A pathway, rugged, steep, and drear,
Bestrewn with leaves all crisp and sere,
With here and there a smiling flower
That blooms to fade within an hour.

A journey through a pathless night,
A misty realm of gloom and blight
With here and there a starry ray
To show the dangers of the way.

A song arising, low and dread,
By tears and bitter murmurs fed,
With now and then a joyful strain,
That robs one cadence of its pain.

A longing, lingering, looking back
Upon the swift-receding track,
With now and then a trembling gaze
Into the future's mystic haze.

A restless, fevered, vague unrest,
A glimmer on the river's breast
That widens, deepens with the stream,
Into Eternity's still dream.

IN CAMDEN WOOD.

I.

HE who would stay his fainting faith
Should breathe the hill's inspiring breath;
And nerve his spirit for the strife
With echoes of the brown quail's fife.
If he would hide one summer day
From care's corroding touch away,
Let him go where beyond the town,
The woodland sits in silken gown,
And safe within her faithful hold
The secret shall remain untold.

Between the town and Camden Wood
The river runs; and oft I've stood
Upon the bridge's painted beam
And followed in my fancy's dream
The sparkle of a tiny thread
Just creeping from its rocky bed
Amid the mountains dark and wild,
And playing like a gleeful child,

With broken bits of sheen and shade,
Its way 'neath laurel thickets made;
Then flashing forth with wild delight
In cataracts of green and white,
Came widening down into the glen,
A servant in the hands of men.
This was above the bridge; below
A-shimmer in the sunset glow,
With steadier sweep and many a bend,
I saw the waters westward trend
To join the clear Ohio's shore,
The River of the Woods no more.

This is the forest free and wild,
Unkept of man, and undefiled
With ax and saw of lumberman,
Though oft his thrifty glances scan
The poplars fair and walnuts brown
Along their stems from root to crown,
With calculation swift and neat,
Of just how many cubic feet.
This is the forest free and grand,
As fashioned by creative hand;
No knife has pruned the underbrush
Beneath whose tangled tresses blush
The fragile flowers of the shade
In dainty loveliness arrayed,
As if some spirit of the air
In careless mood had dropped them there.
The prying sunbeams never look

On misty green of many a nook
Where odors strange and sweet arise
Like a stray breath from Paradise;
For this is where the elfin crew
Their hidden revelries pursue,
And on the fern-seed cast the spell
Which makes a man invisible
Forevermore to mortal sight,
If gathered on the fateful night.
Never for me the place and hour
Together came; but from the bower
I stole the secret of its shade;
I learned how all the wood was made.

II.

HOW THE WOOD WAS MADE.

The artist, Nature, walked one day
Where knolls and valleys barren lay,
And naked rocks on every height
Were sweltering in the garish light,
And lingering there in musing mood
She planned and planted Camden Wood.
Here first she made the cooling breeze,
And then she set the leafy trees,
The hickory with his ragged cloak,
Erect and firm the sachem oak,
The birch-tree graceful as a maid,
And the bird-haunted beeches' shade;
The fair bacchante sycamore

Her dappled fawn-skin 'round her wore,
And shook her golden-tasseled head
At all the coaxing breezes said.
A silent, swart, Egyptian band
Of gum-trees, weather-scarred and tanned,
Stood sentinel about the hoard
Of sweets within the maples stored.
The buckeye with its blossoms pied,
The service-tree veiled like a bride,
And walnuts 'neath whose tawny skin
The bitter blood was rioting,—
All, all, and many more she set,—
But all unfinished seemed it yet.
And then she flung from rock to tree
A robe of greenest tapestry;
And all the forest-coverts caught
Some fringes her deft fingers wrought.
Insurgent host of ivies scaled
The castled rocks with fingers mailed;
And twining, creeping, trailing things
Went softly fluttering into rings
Till every hardy sapling felt
The climbing fingers at his belt.
And then she bade the flowers spring;
And here and there a glancing wing
With rainbow tints she covered o'er—
A glancing wing forevermore,—
And some gray birds with mottled breast
She bade remain and build their nest
Within the dusky dingles near,

Where in the floodtide of the year,
The livelong day their voices swell
Clear-toned and ringing like a bell.
And myriads of shining things
Came floating down with noiseless wings
Upon the beams of golden light .
She sifted through the leafy height.
Then strung upon a silver thread
The wimpling waters onward sped ;
Or cinctured in the hollow stone
Like gems of clearest crystal shone.
When all was done, at sunset close,
She stopped a moment to repose
Within the sheltered sloping land.
Upon the palette in her hand
The softest shades of colors lay,
Of brown, and green and silver-gray,
And iridescent hues that glow
Within the heaven's bended bow ;
She mixed them with a glamour sweet,
And dropped them idly at her feet.
The breezes caught them as they fell
And changed them with a whispered spell ;
And where they touched the mellow earth
A verdure new sprang into birth.
It wore the palm-tree's feathered crest,
In fringe and spangles it was dressed ;
O'er softest robes of green and gray
It wore the jewels of the May ;
And lighter than the clouds of spring,

It crept about each crumbling thing.
It wrapped each dull, decaying form
In velvet mantle, soft and warm,
As if to fearing man it saith:
"Behold how very fair is death!"
And thus within the twilight shade
Were moss and ferns and lichens made;
And thus beneath the twilight dew
The moss and ferns and lichens grew.
Before the artist left the place
She bade the lichen pencils trace
A legend on the page of stone;
But he, beloved of her, alone
Can read the lines he may not speak.
Then in the ferns, with sudden freak
She folded softly from the day
Some tiny, brown-capped elves away.
But in the selvedge of the wood,
Ling'ring she seized—ah, cruel mood!
A lovely Mænad singing there;
And pinned her by the yellow hair
Beneath the waters cold and deep,
Where you may hear her sob and weep.

Ah, mine is but an idle lay,
An idle hour to while away;
But you within the secret dell
The lichens' lettered weird may spell,
And learn the legend if you seek,
Which you may never, never speak.

III.

IN THE VALLEY OF DREAMS.

Here where the pink-lipped orchid died, a weed
Its gaudy clusters flaunts, and faithless bees,
Their springtime love forgot, their revels keep
Within its golden chambers. And lest Care
Should claim the hour, I've hidden it beneath
The opal banners of the autumn wood.
Away with Care! into the heart of man
He stealeth deep, and where his presence is
The verdure withers and the song is dead.
Better it is to rest upon this bank
Of jeweled moss, and let the woven light
And shade our fitful fancies snare
Within their shining meshes, than to bend
An aching brow above the yellow page
Of man's unsatisfying lore; to lie
Enfolded by the autumn's mellow mood
As yonder cliff's gray wall in sunshine steeped;
To breathe as languid zephyrs breathe,
To rest as rests the many-colored tranquil wood.

There is a pleasing mystery that steals
Upon the musing mind of man unsought,
And opening wide the windows of the soul,
Makes him contemporary with all time.
As once within the Autumn's painted bowers
I lay half-hidden from the noontide glow,

Afar away did seem to float the hum
And whir of drowsy insects murmuring
Amid the golden-dusted blooms, and borne
Upon the viewless wings of reverie,
Through rounded centuries I drifted back
And drank the primal freshness of the world.
And thus I stood in ancient Britainy
With him, the great magician, Merlin named,
And her sung by all bards the beautiful,
Yet false, forsworn, and wily Vivien.
Old is the story told by many tongues
And heard by many ears; but ever seems
False notes to mar its changeful melody,—
But will you hear it as I read it once
From their own faces in the autumn wood?

In the dark glass of destiny the seer
Had seen the passing of white-souled king
And the destruction of his peerless knights,
The overthrow of peace and harmony
And all the dismal time which was to come.
And half to hide his heavy countenance,
And half because a dreary purpose wrought
Within his mind, he fled from Arthur's court
And hid himself amid the deepest shades
Of the near wood. And Vivien followed him
Unasked, but still expected, for the power
Was his to do the thing he willed, and draw
The footsteps of the bidden one, as tides
By the round moon are drawn from farthest shores.

They crossed the smooth, bright waters in a boat,
And came into a woody basin wide,
And ringed upon the north, the east, and south
With circled line of the blue hills. The west
An open gateway, golden in the light
Of slanting sunbeams, stood; and you could see
Across the water and the open space,
Far off a solitary turret gleam.
The wizard, grand and awful in his gloom,
Unspeaking sat beneath a tree. He felt
The weight of his great age upon his soul
Press heavily; his life outran the span
Of many generations; deep was he
In magic steeped; and all throughout the land
The saying dwelt that Merlin could not die.
But unto him was known a nameless spell,
Which, wrought upon the sleeping, he who slept
Awakened nevermore to sight and sound;
But lay entranced within a hollow land
Invisible forevermore, and dead
To all the voices of the calling years.
Few leaves had fallen, but a subtile flush
Upon the forest's emerald had crept,
And on the borders of the open paths
The wild grass hung its gray and scarlet fringe;
And slender bars of sunlight slanted through
The thin blue vapor of the wood and broke
In fretted rainbows upon Vivien's head.
Down to her sandaled feet in clinging curves
Her silken gown of softest primrose swept;

About her waist a band of shining gold
Clasped with a green-eyed dragon's head, enscaled
And crusted o'er with gems of dazzling white,
With heart-red drops of rubies interspersed;
Her brow, her cheeks, her softly rounded arms
And graceful throat, as ivory crucifix
Were colorless save for the sunset glow
And the warm flush of the red-tinted wood.
A jeweled dagger held her dusky hair,
But the escaping locks down to her waist
In gentle undulations fell, and hung
Like deepest hemlock shade above her brow.
Her eyes?—Have you not looked into a pool
Of water which welled up from darkest depths
Of cold gray stone, and caught upon its breast
The warm brown of the fallen leaf, the deep
Clear emerald of the lichen, and the gloom
Of wind-clouds with the rifts of sunshine pierced?
Thus Vivien's eyes the color of her mood
Took on; to one man black, to one man blue,
To other softest hazel hue, and grave
Or gay as fancy taught, for each man found
Within their depths the soul his soul had sought.
The dainty grace of girlishness bespoke
The simple, tender, loving-hearted maid;
The thin curve of her scarlet lips might well
Befit a serpent temptress; the wide brow
A man's strong counselor and friend bespoke.
Which was she? All, as the demand might be;

For woman in all ages is the same,
She does but answer to the stronger voice.

So Vivien stood within the darkening wood,
Like some smooth bird of paradise with plumes
Of palest gold. And Merlin felt his hour
Draw near; but will she answer to his will?
Too curious Vivien! Her eyes well matched
The dragon orbs upon her belt—when from
His loosened grasp she drew the serpent staff
And o'er the sleeping wizard cast the spell
No mortal power might break forevermore;
And in the hollow land, invisible,
By her bereft of weariness and pain,
Lies Merlin dreamless still. And Vivien?
Had you not marked the hand whose fibers lay
Banded like steel within their velvet case?
Could she forget? Ah, well! I only know
The voice that in the deepest forest lives
Is never merry; laughs not; sighs and grieves,
And going, comes again to grieve and sigh
Like one who tries and ever tries in vain
A sleeper's fettered spirit to unchain.

IV.

L'ENVOI.

How strange the slumb'rous fancies seem
That hover o'er a wakening dream.
Was yonder rock, bearded and gray,
Merlin, august and stern? That spray
Of golden-rod beside it there,
The slender form of Vivien fair?
This woody shore not Brittany
But the new land? And this must be
Little Kanawha's rippling tide
And not the classic waters wide—
And that white spire upon the hill
The village church, remote and still.
Ah, royal wood, I know thee well,
It needs no wizard old to spell
Thy written fate. The coming tread
Of iron courser shakes with dread
The bosom of thy calm retreat,
And low thy numbered pulses beat.
And oft upon the Sabbath morn,
Hands in his pockets, beard unshorn,
The rustic Dives wanders by
And casts a calculating eye
Upon thy timber grand and old,
Upon thy depths of richest mold;
And ever in his fancy's ear

The chopper's ax rings loud and clear ;
And harvests of the golden corn
Are of his greedy visions born.
And I, too, hear the groaning sigh
With which thy charms lie down to die.
When tott'ring 'neath the steady stroke
With awful crash the mighty oak,
The monarch of the centuries,
Amid the cruel ruin lies,
Which his descending arm has hurled
Upon the hapless sylvan world.

I follow still the fallen tree
Upon the wind of destiny,
Where deep, estranging waters meet
The alien skies. Beneath his feet
As iron firm the wanderer feels
The beams of oak, and through him steals
The quiet of the pathless wood,
Its languor mingles with his blood,
And memory's gentle herald spoke
Its message through the heart of oak.

Or barred behind an iron door
Upon his cell's close-fibered floor,
Some fettered wretch penned up to die
May sleeping dream of liberty.

I see the gleaming mattock swung
Above thy fair, unsheltered young ;
And watch with mingled grief and shame,

The swift, devouring tongues of flame
Lap thy life current rich and strong.—
Forever still the gray bird's song;
For patient oxen to and fro,
Across thy blackened acres go;
And blistering 'neath shadeless sky
The orchids in the furrows lie,
With all their chaliced sweetness trod
Beneath the foot of living clod.
A quagmire reeking with the scum
Of stagnant waters, where the hum
Of marsh-bred insects and the cry
Abhorred by every passer-by,
Of the green-spotted, loathsome toad,
Alone shall be the funeral ode
Of thy pure spring whose waters clear
Mirrored the antlers of the deer,
Or feathered crest of Indian chief
More swarthy than the fallen leaf,
Or dusky eyes of forest girl
Whose locks outshone the singing merle.
Yet it may be one passing by,
Amid the ruined waste may spy
A slender stem of ebony
Beneath its fringéd canopy;
While ferny odors cool and sweet,
His half-believing senses greet,
And marvel that a thing so fair
Should keep its dainty footing there;
And if he be of Nature's lore

A lover true, he'll ponder o'er
Her lengthened scroll to find the key
Unto the fern's green mystery.
So frail and yet so strong they grow
Beneath the beds of drifted snow,
And in the rifts of barren rock
Beyond the shepherd's questing flock;
They cluster in the darkest dell,
Climb down into the gray-walled well,
And the smooth water bending o'er
Narcissus-like, themselves adore.

O shade of Merlin, couldst thou tell
To me the long-forgotten spell
Of waving hand and woven pace,
This wood with all its witching grace,
Encircled by the magic maze
Should vanish softly from the gaze
Of crafty eye forevermore.
But there should be a secret door
Whose noiseless hinge should inward swing
When in the mild delicious spring
The child who loves the violet
Her dainty footsteps hither set,
Who names the birdlings in their nests
Yet leaves them with unfluttered breasts.
Here early in ambrosial June,
With all its harmonies in tune,
Unwittingly should lovers blind
Sometimes the mystic portal find,

And in their young hearts warm and strong
Should carry hence the thrushes' song
To cheer life's dreary solitude,
When far from the enchanted wood
With all his witching glamour fled
Fond Love himself lies cold and dead.
Here should the haunted worldling come
When Flattery's fevered lips are dumb;
Misled by Fortune's fickle flame
And broken on the wheel of fame,
From maddening whirl and senseless shout
Of the Circean, swinish rout,
He here should rest his dying head
Upon the woodland's leafy bed
Where in the silence cool and clear,
Spirits of mercy linger near.
Open that door should ever be
Unto the child of phantasy;
He should not mingle with the herd
Who never felt their pulses stirred
With echoes of the hidden lyre
With flashes of the sacred fire.
The wind should teach him fancies fine,
The water, melodies divine;
His heart should feed itself among
The idyls of the stars unsung;
And the soft graces of the wood
Should mingle ever with his blood,
Until his earth-cleansed eyes could see
Beyond the soul's veiled mystery.

Then to the weary world his song
Should come as heart throbs warm and strong;
Within it there should ever ring
The laughter of the happy spring,
The forest's quiet scorn of ills,
The strength of the unshaken hills,
Faith, steadfast as the circling spheres,
And hope triumphant over fears.
Then with'ring doubt forever fled
Should hide in shame his serpent head;
And the uplifted world should hail
Her sister spheres beyond the veil.—
A day-dream vain! with ling'ring sigh
I read thy doom; thou passeth by.

CHRISTMAS BELLS.

Rondeau.

ACROSS the fields there wakes and swells
Afar the sound of Christmas bells;
And listening in the starry night,
My soul is stirred with strange delight,
As from the earth's remotest cells
A faint harmonious echo wells,
And softly, sweetly, gladly tells
The sleeping vale and shrouded heights,
"*The Christ is born.*"

O sing for joy, ye frozen fells!
Rejoice aloud, ye hollow dells!
His star ascendeth clear and bright,
His kingdom cometh in its might,
And peace with him forever dwells.—
The Christ is born.

A BRIEF INTERVIEW.

NAY, come not nearer, comrade of the brake,
Whose scaly curves enfold the fallen branch
Like glistening bands of polished ebony,
I seek no close companionship with thee.
I like not much thy forkéd darting tongue;
And in thy scintillating orbs, methinks
I see red-handed murder's baleful gleam.
I am no Mother Eve to be beguiled
With all thy sleek, insinuating wiles;
The blood of innocents is on thy head.
What, wilt thou not begone? Why then must I
My footsteps backward trace with creepy chill,
As if some evil thing stole on my track?
I harm thee not; the wood is wide. Not mine
The guiltless hand to cast accusing stone.

With such uncanny feelings I have held
Converse with some in human form, whose wit

With swift electric touch transmuted oft
The leaden hours into moments fraught
With the divinest fancy. When they went
Across my threshold, out into the night,
I've glanced down at the sill with nervous thought
Of witch-charms; and half-guiltily have wished
That it with holy water were besprent;
With vague uneasiness have flared the lamps
Up to their very brightest, and have urged
The fire into crackling flames; the while
Have at my very foot-stool looked askance
Lest into a black poodle it should turn.
And still half-shivering to bed have crept
Feeling that I had been holding, as now,
An interview with Mephistopheles.

LIFE'S QUESTIONINGS.

WHO that hath listened, hath not heard arise
From hearts disquieted with thoughts of death,
Murmurs and anxious questionings like these—
And destiny makes answer to them all:

"When I am dead whose hand will bring
To my low grave some trace of spring?
A token of remembrance brief
Expressed by one unfolding leaf.

Will pluck for me the tinted flowers
Within the forests waking bowers,
Beneath whose shadows, faint and still,
They whisper to the purling rill—
Say, will no one to that lone spot
Bring one pale blue forget-me-not?"

"Hush, restless heart, it can not be,
The spring-time comes no more for thee,
The woods with bursting buds are rife,
But they shall crown the brow of life,
And wave in garlands fresh and gay,
Around the blue-eyed Queen of May.
Yes, meet is spring-time's breezy mirth
For every laughing child of earth;
And no sad memories may rise
'Neath her sweet voice and beaming eyes."

"When summer comes, shall not one rose
Of all the waving tree bestows,
By some true friend of days long fled
Be plucked in memory of the dead?
One crimson rose, within whose breast
The scented dew-drops lightly rest;
Or one spray of the trailing flower
That decks the maiden's favored bower?
What hast thou for thine absent child,
Thou queen of seasons, warm and wild?"

"O, murmuring heart, why still lament?
All of thy summer days are spent;

The roses blush 'neath Beauty's glance,
'Midst song and laugh and flying dance
They glow against her burnished hair;
Their subtile fragrance fills the air
Where buoyant hearts, careless and free,
Are thrilled with music's witchery;
From scenes of mirth thou long hast fled—
What to the living are the dead?"

"When the sweet summer sinks to rest
Within the autumn's glowing breast,
And dreamily the golden haze
Creeps through the woodland's winding maze:
When through the gloaming reapers come
Singing the joyous 'Harvest-Home,'
Will one regretful thought of me
Arise on its soft melody
And bid them cast a whispering wave
Of scarlet leaves upon my grave?"

"'T is vain, sad heart! Thinkest thou when
The russet leaves bestrew the glen,
When days are fair, and warm, and still,
And gladly murmurs every rill,
When round, bright moons through all the night
Bathe the calm earth in softest light,
That one full heart will less rejoice
For mem'ry of an absent voice?
What have the radiant and gay
To do with darkness and decay?"

"When winter spreads his snowy pall
Over the brilliant robe of fall,
When all the grass is brown and sere
And hollow winds are sad and drear,
Whose hand for me a wreath will twine
Of holly leaves or sighing pine?
Of waving ferns, free and unpressed,
Light fringes from the mountain's crest—
Blest season of the starry night,
Shall I not share thy treasures bright?"

"Still dost thou speak? O, troubled heart,
Thou art a thing from life apart.
The banquet hall hath ferns and pine
Reflected in its sparkling wine;
And holly berries glance in glee
Where lingers not a trace of thee.
Ah, who will quit the festal throng
And pause where thou hast slumbered long,
Leaving an ivy leaf to say:
'I miss thee on this happy day'?"

"Still, if above thy dreamless sleep
The gray moss, even, should not creep,
Why shouldst thou grieve? Earth is but dust;
Her gems are clay, her gold is rust.
And, somewhere, for the striving soul,
There lies a fair, celestial goal,
Beyond the dark'ning hand of time,
'Midst choral symphonies sublime,

Where angel hands shall cull for thee
The flowers of Immortality."

RESURGAM.

I STOOD beside the ocean's broad expanse
When silently the melancholy Night
Her legions led against the dying sun.
Far to the inland rose a lofty height,
Gray-walled, and summit-crowned with somber pines,
The incense of whose fragrant breathing crept
About the beach, and mingled with the moan
Of the sad waves, that evermore beat out
Their weary lives against the answering rocks:
And as I gazed a strange, magnetic thrill
Of sympathy with the departing king
Within my spirit rose. His face was cold;
Around him forms impalpable and dread,
Were closing in; and from the deep uprose
Unnumbered shadowy arms to drag him down.
He sank, but with his latest glance inscribed
Upon the granite mountain's living page
In burning letters: "I shall rise again."

I walked where fierce December winds had swept
The forest bare of flowers, of leaves, and birds;
And under heavy skies the tuneless earth

Lay scarred and blackened like a wasted life;
But kneeling low upon her frozen breast,
I felt the strong, resistless tide of Life's
Electric current flowing far beneath.
I heard the warm hearts of the flowers beat
In unison divine, and their soft tones
Reverberating, low through nature's depths
The joyful pæan: "I shall rise again."

Within a shrouded chamber, in the chill,
Unanswering company of death, I sat,
Nor did I watch alone. Repulsive forms
Around me thronged, and wrought their subtle spells
Upon my soul; and, like Laocoön
Struggling in vain against the tightening folds
Of the gigantic monsters of the sea,
My spirit writhed beneath those icy bonds;
Beside me cold Annihilation raised
Her mocking face, and whispered, "Look the last
Upon yon soulless form—I claim my own."

I turned my troubled gaze, and lo! the dawn
Of glorious Immortality had traced
Upon the chiseled features of the dead,
In joy and peace, ineffable: "Although
The grave consume me, I shall rise again."

IN OCTOBER.

I SAID to my heart in October,
October the golden and rare,
When the glow of an Indian-summer
Had melted into the blue air:
"O, low-beating heart, you are weary
Beneath the brown earth's mellow crest,
Asleep with a garland of lilies
Like new-fallen snow on her breast,
The sweet maiden, Summer, is lying,
With zephyrs and perfume o'ercast—
Not dead, O, not dead, but awaking
Again when the winter is past.
I'll hide you away in her bosom
From the drip of the pitiless rain,
From the voice of the wind whose hoarse sobbing
Has thrilled you and filled you with pain."
So I wreathed its love-chambers with myrtle,
Cast from them the cypress and pine,
And filled them with orient roses,
With starlight and incense divine.
Ere I closed them there crept in, unbidden,
The sorrowful cry of a bird,
Low, thrilling with bitterest anguish
The echoes it yet scarcely stirred.

But I said: "Let it be; in the stillness,
And perfume of roses so deep,
Far down 'neath the wild winter riot,
It surely will rest, it will sleep."
From its white-bannered fane of Ambition
I banished the demons afar;
I burnished the altar of Glory
Till it shone with the light of a star;
But through the bare aisles there went wailing
The voices of storm and unrest,
So old! I had heard them forever
Complain in unsatisfied quest:
"Deep, deep let them lie," then, I whispered,
"Those sounds of all tortures the worst,
And I shall be free, for a season,
From their turbulent voices accurst."

So I buried my heart with the Summer,
In her grave 'neath the sounding trees;
And lightly I fled with the sunbeams,
Far away to the southern seas.
"O, Life, let your tempest, unbridled,
Break now o'er the shuddering main,"
I said, "for my heart lies in quiet,
Remembering not its old pain."

"In vain, O my heart, the wild voices
Of dreary December, to-night,
Call loudly of wreck and of ruin,

Of tempest, of madness, and blight,
They wake and make answer—those voices
That vexed thee, of storm and unrest—
Far off, 'neath the dark forest lying
Clasped close to the Summer's still breast.
And faintly, above their wild clamor,
There wails the low cry of a bird,
The hemlocks have heard it and whisper,
The cypress-tree listened and stirred."

Is there rest from the pitiless beating,
The voices, the moan of the blast,
In the still summer-land of Hereafter,
When life's dreary winter is past?

THE GOSSIP.

HER name is legion; and her likeness—well,
'T is hard to find a fitting parallel,
For like the unclean sprites of Spenser's rhyme,
Her changeful visage ever suits the time.
With features sanctified, and placid mien,
In holy sanctuaries she is seen.
The brow which bends before the sacred feast
Oft wears the hidden signet of the beast.
This blushing maiden, fair as a pink pearl,
Can any evil lurk in this sweet girl?

O skeptic, from her curved lips as she sleeps
The red mouse of the Brocken softly creeps.
A vampire, battening in the warm life stream
From sleeping victims drawn she well might seem;
But vampires haunt unhallowed night alone,
And she, all times and seasons are her own.
A ghoul at its foul feast in church-yard dread?
O no; ghouls banquet only on the dead.
A viper hissing forth its poison sprays?
Nay, vipers lurk not in familiar ways.
Vain search! Of loathsome slimy things which creep
The earth, or in the felon's dungeon deep
On frightful dreams arise like sorcery,
There lives not aught abhorred and foul as she.
May she be known? Ay, truly may she be.
Would you be warned the tests are fair and free;
Place her amid the fairest flowers that bloom,
Mark how she sickens 'neath their rare perfume
And seeks, with all a miser's anxious greed,
The fetid odors of the one rank weed.
When the wood-thrushes on a thousand hills
Are fluting out their soft, harmonious trills,
She will hear naught but echoes scarcely stirred
By one green-spotted toad you had not heard.
With changeful opal gems her pathway strew,
And see her still her eager search pursue
Amid their unseen splendor's ceaseless play,
Till she hath found the lump of common clay.
If in her hands a character you place,
Composed of gentle loveliness and grace,

Of stainless truth and charity benign,
With cunning haste she 'll rend the structure fine
To find the leper-spot behind the screen,
The one small pit which you had never seen.
However fair, however richly dressed,
Once known, avoid her as you would the pest.

POESY.

Rondeau.

I ASKED a boon. The gods on high
Were dumb, till Pity with a sigh,
Plucking a hollow reed, arose—
A hollow reed was all she chose
And gave. The gates were shut, and I
With rueful heart and lips all dry
Essayed the slender gift to try
And touched the charméd fount that flows
From Helicon.

I breathe the breath of gods. I lie
On golden shores of Arcady;
And softly life forever goes,
The world forgotten and its woes,
While I with all the gods may vie
On Helicon.

MEMORY.

THE realm of the Past! It lies far away
In silence, unbroken and dread.
Its shadowy light widens not into day;
But moonshine and stars hold their mystical sway;
And cold is the glist of each motionless ray
That lights the pale land of the dead—
That shrouds with a silvery mist-veil of tears
The crypt of the lost and beautiful years.

In vain do we reach our hand toward that shore,
Oblivion's wave rolls between.
It widens forever; and still evermore
Flows silently over the legends of yore,
Lost jewels, the rarest of wisdom's bright store,
Forgotten, unwept, and unseen.
Its desolate calm unstirred by the sweep
Of white-winged ships coming in from the deep.

Yet we freighted our ships with many a bale
And saw them grow small to our sight,
And year after year, till the hours grow pale
We wearily watch for the gleam of a sail.
Our hearts rise and fall with each wavering gale;
Our hopes fade alike with the light;

Yet are they sailing to us is unknown,
On what nameless seas by the wild tempests blown.

Oft as we pause on the star-gilded strand
  Awaiting the flush of the dawn,
A phantom steals slowly o'er driftwood and sand,
And gathers the shells with a trembling hand;
Touching the waves with her magical wand
  They murmur like streams that are gone—
And softly, sweet music floats o'er the shore,
Songs half-forgotten, yet missed evermore.

Sung by the voices long since unheard,
  Dreamful as strains the gnome-bard sings;
With the rhythm and rhyme of leaves that are stirred
By a half-breathed sigh, or a half-spoken word;
By the quivering trill of a distant bird,
  Or the rustle of silken wings.
Ah, whence does it come—this melody?
Do our ships sail in from the unknown sea?

We listen; the hopes in our bosoms surge high.
  "At last! They are coming at last!"
But the waves sink in silence, the sweet echoes die;
The glimmering daylight steals on the eye;
The shadowy form as a mist-wreath goes by;
  The dream of enchantment is past.
The shores resound with tumultuous tread,
For life is abroad, the night dream is dead.

Yes, the world comes out with its scheming brain,
  Its careless heart and bustling feet;
And we follow the current of life again,
Holding the links of a broken chain
Scattered and crushed by the laboring wain,
  Still warm with magic, old and sweet—
For 't was wrought by Memory's trembling hands
Out of treasures culled on the mystic sands.

Though all may smile, and many may sneer,
  That we cherish a thing so slight,
To us 't is the key of a happier sphere
Where again we shall meet with the all missed here,
Unfanned by a sigh and undimmed with a tear
  On the shores of eternal light,
Where, safe in the beautiful havens, we
Shall meet with the ships we have lost at sea.

LINES

Suggested by the Grave of Roberta Edmiston.

NO transient guest is Sorrow. She doth move
  With leaden footsteps, heavier day by day;
And on their mournful echoes still arise
The tender mem'ries of our loved and lost.
With falt'ring step of age and spent with toil;
With manhood's strong ambitions yet undimmed;

Or breathing still the tender grace of youth—
Even as a child turns from a broken toy,
They put aside this living warmth, and pass
Into the silence of Eternity.
And as we stand, with hot rebellious hearts,
Beside their sodden graves, 't is hard to lay
Our selfishness aside, and say for them—
For the unnumbered dead—that it is well.
Life's fairest flowers are plucked from desert soil;
Its lightest breeze is heavy with the weight
Of sighs and bitter tears; and well we know
The key-note of its sweetest songs is pain.
Is there not comfort then, for those whose grief
Falls like a winter rain, in the dear words,
"Sheltered and safe from sorrow" are the dead?

I look upon the monument—an urn
Half-veiled and with closed lid—which stands
Above this sweet, dead girl, and unto me
It seems an emblem of the life which is;
A prophecy of that which is to come.
Enclosed and shrouded from our mortal gaze
Are the deep mysteries of love and grief;
But in the still serenity that lies
Within the confines of the great Beyond,
Where all these changeful voices are at rest,
Shall we not find the pure white urn of Life,
Its crystal fullness then unveiled, for aye,
And from its peaceful bosom gather up

The ruined fragments of our broken hopes
Into one blest and pure reality?

DREAM-HAUNTED.

THE sky was wonderfully bright
That shone upon his infant face;
But o'er his head one brilliant star
Sadly withdrew her golden grace.

Within the northland, bleak and far,
The fierce wild winds were firmly tied;
But one sad zephyr claimed the hour,
And ling'ring round his cradle sighed.

And from that hour his life was charmed
Beyond the power of word or deed;
Ever he wandered forth alone,
Dream-haunted by each stream and mead.

And sometimes when the quiet tears
Of summer fell in gentle showers
And one sad zephyr shook them down
From the half-opened meadow-flowers,

Reclined amid the rushes green
That whispered by the gliding river,
His hollow-reed awoke sweet notes
Unheard before and lost forever.

The carol of each bird was hushed;
The wond'ring river paused to see,
As back and forth the rushes swayed,
If Pan alive again might be.

He little recked the sons of strife
Passed by that way, nor stayed to hear;
His music was the echoing
Of spirit whispers, soft and clear.

He loved his mother, Nature, well,
Nor cared he other friend to seek;
She soothed him in her faithful arms
With tuneful numbers, pure and meek,

And when at length, asleep for aye,
He lay upon her gentle breast,
No one in passing paused to say:
"Peace to thee; soul, take thou thy rest."

He knew it not; but if a bird
Whose broken wing he bound, poured out
Her sorrow to the starless night,
If wandering the world about,

That one sad zephyr sighed in vain
For trace of him on land or sea,
Surely, in dreams it grieved him yet—
Forgotten they could never be.

MY NEIGHBORS.

'TIS little things that make or break our rest;
And darkest hours reveal our strength or weakness.
So, when the petty darts my neighbors cast,
By malice winged, and in detraction steeped,
Had reached their mark, what wonder for an hour
My narrow walls encompassed all the world,
And that was rue and wormwood unto me.
What wonder in the bitterness that sprang
From sense of wrong, and withering disgust
That womanhood could stoop so low, I said,
"The brazen armor that my neighbors wear
Is full of flaws which a true shaft might pierce;
And why permit a poison reptile thus
To trail its slimy length across my way,
Nor hurl it back into the seething depths
Of envy whence it crept?" Then the low tones
Of those true friends of old, the wind and rain,
Outside my window, sang my wrath away,
Until upon their gentle numbers borne,
The spirit of the ages talked with me.

The ceaseless sweep of wide encircling seas;
The lonely grandeur of enduring hills;
Voices of subterranean depths profound;
The rustling wings of myriad growing things;
The gentle breathing of unfolding leaves—
All the low whispers of the living earth
Within my pulses made sweet melody.
And with the clearer vision which attends
On widening knowledge, I beheld the spheres
Rolling in harmony divine; and heard
The wondrous anthem of the universe.
Then far beneath me seemed the troubled moan
Of a vexed world, where I beheld a mass
Of struggling beings—men, my brothers—each
With lep'rous sores in that clear light made bare,
Toiling with weary footsteps toward the abyss
That we call death. And in my heart the tides
Of pity and remorse surged like a sea.
"Is it thy hand," questioned my soul, "that still
Into another's cankered wounds would pour
The poison gall of passion and revenge?
Only a little while and the swift winds
Shall search, and find no trace on land or sea,
Of all who hate or love. A tiny span,
And the frail barriers of time and space
And death, even as a foam-wreath shall dissolve;
Then truth, and purity, and love, alone,
Shall find the immortality beyond."
Ah, nobler far than he who wins a world

Is one, in conscious right impregnable,
Who hears, yet answers not, a sland'rous tongue.

COMRADE WIND.

COMRADE wind, how fast you fly.
Stay a moment, it is I

Calling to you from the gloom
Of a care-enshrouded room,

Where the shadows weave for me
Grayest web of destiny.

I would follow you once more
Through the vanished days of yore;

Sing with you the olden rhymes,
Ring with you the wildwood chimes;

In the March-time rocking still
In hickory saplings on the hill,

Sometimes low and sometimes high.
Comrade wind, yourself and I

Tossing in tumultuous glee,
As the birds in summer free;

While the lowing, speckled herd
The dry grass beneath us stirred,

While the tinkle, tinkle still
Of a bell came from the hill

Where the bleating, fleecy flocks
Nibbled fern amid the rocks.

How we mocked them, you and I,
Swinging low, and swinging high.

While I listen, to me sing
Softly of the happy spring,

When the child-year, full of glee,
Wakes his gladdest minstrelsy.

Does the broomsedge on the plain
Shake her yellow locks again

O'er the nest the partridge hid
Deep the tangled grass amid?

Are the dogwood twigs aglow
With the secret that we know?

Do the maple branches shine
Redder than the clearest wine?

Is the spice-bud's slender crown
Turning to a golden brown?

Are the willows varnished o'er
With the glory that they wore

When we roused the sleeping stream
From its chilly winter dream?

Sail the cloud boats rapidly
As they did when you and I

O'er the meadows dawning green
Chased the flying shade and sheen?

Ah, how fast you speed along!
You are still so swift and strong.

Now I hear the cadence free
Of the brown wren's minstrelsy

As he plasters 'neath the eaves
Mud and straw and silken leaves;

And the blue-bird's twittering
In the snag beside the spring,

Where the dainty wind-flower wore
Ruffled cape and pinafore—

Elfin maiden, fair and good—
In the fringes of the wood.

Now the throbbing echoes come
Of the pheasant's muffled drum;

And the speckled thrush's song,
Like a bell-note, clear and strong,

Rings above the sloping land
Where the smooth-limbed red-buds stand,

Dressed in pink from frock to snood.
Blushing in the leafless wood.

Onward, softly now we sweep
Through the orchard grasses deep,

Shaking down the tinted hair
Of the apple-blossoms there;

Setting all the incense free
Of each flower-laden tree;

Breaking every shining thread
Mischief-plotting spiders spread.

Close the speckled eggs are pressed
'Neath the cat-bird's dusky breast;

Filled with mirth and mocking glee,
Her glad mate sings ceaselessly.

While the swallows dip and rise
From the river to the skies—

Nothing half so free you sing,
As a swallow in the spring.

Are you weary? Shall we stay
In this bower of the May,

Where the wild plum blossoms keep
In their white hearts buried deep,

Something—Ah, why do you sigh?
Faster, faster let us fly.

Yet your voice seems hoarser grown;
Something strange is in its tone;

And your shouts no longer ring
With the gladness of the spring.

Comrade, comrade, is it I?
So to others do you sigh?

Is the world still in its tune
Through the moonlit nights of June?

What is it in you I hear?
Cadences of many a tear;

Muffled sighs that seem to creep
From the crypts where buried deep

Many a fair ambition lies
Under gray, unpitying skies.

It was you who wrapped me 'round
As I lay upon the ground

And in midnight's dusky haze
Veiled my face from mortal gaze;

It was you who stole the pain
From the voices crying "Vain!"

Easing all the secret smart
Of my young, untutored heart;

It was you who brought the balm
From the starlit regions calm,

Tuned anew the harp of life
To the higher, nobler strife.

Comrade mine, your voice is low,
Whither, whither, must you go?

In my heart your songs I keep;
Oft I hear them in my sleep;

Let your parting message be
Full of tenderness for me.

Thus you answer, "I shall come
When to others thou art dumb;

I shall whisper low to thee—
And thou, dear heart, will answer me."

THE GOSPEL PIONEER.

WHERE lies the land that does not sepulcher
Heroic dead? Where desolation broods
O'er the white solitude of voiceless heights,
Deep in the rifted glacier's breast they lie
In changeless beauty while the ages roll.
Above them drift the desert's burning sands;
And ancient catacombs have shut them in;
Their bones lie deep beneath the cold gray stone
Of frowning monuments in mighty lands;
And the dark sea their parting prayer has heard.

There lies no spot obscure where they are not.
And rich are West Virginia's woody vales
With her forgotten heroes' scattered dust;
Her verdure ripens and the tall grain waves
Above the mold of many a kingly heart.
And who have left more noble legacies
To any land than these have left to us?
Redeemed the wilderness. Its roses bloom
In calm content by many a winding stream
Where templed cities raise their heavenward spires;
And grateful thousands chant the songs of praise
Where once the war-whoop's fearful sound arose.
Then let historic page their record keep,
The sculptor's art their deathless story tell;
And their heroic deeds live in the songs
The poet sings. So, shall their memory live
Green in a nation's heart forevermore.

One hundred years ago he went not forth—
This hero of my verse—with polished lance,
In knightly garb and pomp of heraldry,
To the great battle for his Lord and King.
Ill-clad, ill-fed, alone, his only guides
The trend of waters, the emblazoned pine
And living scrolls inscribed upon the stems
Of moss-grown trees, and the unchanging stars
By night. Beneath his feet the deadly coil
Of hidden reptiles lurked. The fierce-eyed wolves
Glared on him from the dusk; and on his track
The crouching panther drew his sinuous length.

No matin song nor requiem the sun
Received from singing bird. Alone was heard
The solitary eagle's scream, the croak
Of hoarse-voiced raven, the ill-boding moan
Of melancholy owl. Yet, it may be,
Prophetic murmurs from the snowy bloom
Of the wild service came where crooning bees
Revealed the secrets of the coming years.
The pine-capped heights were silent witnesses
Of the Eternal Power: and the deep voice
Of falling waters sang His majesty.
Here in these lonely wilds the soul of man
Attained the measure of the solemn wood;
And he who bore Salvation's tidings wrought
With purpose strong as death. No needless care
For food and raiment came to vex his heart—
Were not the ravens fed? the wild beasts housed?
His feet were shod with safety, for the world
Had not its glittering meshes 'round them cast:
And souls to him were given for his hire.
The gloomy shadows of the pathless wood
Imbued his faith with their own somber hues;
And crying in the wilderness, like one
Of old, his voice was heard proclaiming wrath
In Sinai's awful thunders unto man.
Not yet was heard the still small voice of love,
In the soft whispers of eternal peace,
And milder mercies of the later law.
Oppressed with secret fear his spirit still
Upon its onward journey marked the path

That grateful millions travel toward the light.
"Servant of God," the herald angels sang,
"Well done." Beneath his name a nation writes:
"Well done."

Woe to the watchman of to-day
Whose trumpet issues an uncertain sound;
Lest in the world's gay songs of revelry
The note be lost, or all too faintly come
Unto the sleeping. Armed with mighty truth,
Still let his voice be heard throughout the land,
Crying both night and day; and his reward
Shall be the glory of the Lord whose word
Shall stand when Heaven and earth have passed away.

IN THE FIRELIGHT.

WHEN the day has folded its cares away,
And out from the corners peeping,
The shadows muster their quaint array,
And over the room come creeping;
When the dying coals into phantoms grow,
And the pale flame, lapping under,
Like a wizard mutters its fancies low,
With my hands at rest, I wonder:

If the bards who lived when the world was young
  Heard only the white stars singing;
If the chattering apes around them hung,
  Or asps with their hiss and stinging;
If they plucked their bays with a slavish hand,
  To the world's will basely kneeling;
Or sang as the reeds by the river sand,
  The soul of a God revealing;

If the argent shield of the olden time,
  With its grand devices graven,
Was a mask for the foul, unknightly crime
  Of a dastard heart and craven;
And if honor pledged was a fitful jest,
  If truth was an idle seeming,
And faith but the shadowy thing, at best,
  It seems in our firelight dreaming.

Had they cleaner hands, those priests of old,
  Who stood in the sacred places,
Than the ones we know, in their baseness bold,
  With their smooth, deceitful faces?
Ah, I wonder if since the world began,
  The angels have been no nigher;
And if ever this curious life to man,
  Meant half of his strong desire.

Over and over and over again,
  Like an incantation weaving

The fire-wraith mutters his fancies vain,
In tones of a fitful grieving;
And my thought, like the flame, still ponders o'er
The problem of life's endeavor,
For a clue to the soul's unwritten lore,
But an answer findeth never.

AT THE KING'S GATE.

THERE lived a king who, weary of the strife
That wins not, and the questionings that gain
An answer nevermore, sought out a vale
Embowered deep within the Orient;
And there beneath its waving palm-groves built
Him chambered palaces wherein he quaffed
Life's changeful pleasures, warm as the deep glow
That lives within the rose's crimson heart.
There on the tuneful echoes of each day
The night flowed in with song and revelry;
While from the tamarinds the nightingales
Filled all the listening dusks with melody.
And weaving still amid the fleeting hours
Their subtle ministries of soft delight,
Each in her changing beauty ever fair,
With footfall echoless around him came
The daughters light of music and of love.
But when the song was sweetest, and the wine

Quivered like flame within its crystal bowl,
The laugh died on his lips, and o'er his brow,
A sudden darkness as of inward pain
Its leaden shadows hung; and starting up
Like one who hears a signal call, he sought
Afar the palm-grove's deepest solitude:
And prone in its perennial verdure sunk
He strove to grasp the haunting mysteries
That sapped the hidden fountain of his joys.
For, ever as he reveled to his ear
Low, wailing tones unheard of others came;
And when he drank within the cup there gleamed,
In pallid mockery, a wondrous pearl
That vanished with the bubbles from his sight.
From the pomegranate bough he plucked the fruit,
And on its golden circle traced strange words
That shook his heart with dread. Oft in the hush
Of night, through his unquiet slumber crept
The subtile presence of a thing divine.
Myrrh-wafting fragrance, breathing softest dews
Of healing o'er his fretted brain; and on
His waking sight a moment shone a crown
Of purest immortelles, all luminous
With the white glory of the fadeless stars,
That evermore dissolved into the night,
And in his eager fingers left no trace.
Long in that melancholy calm which soothed
Him not, he lingered, while the fountain dropped
Its silver rain into the hollow leaves.
Led by the shining cross, the starry host

In silence fled before the gleaming dawn.
From the far heights swept down the cooling winds,
And through the lone acacia's yellow strands
Their waves of mournful music washed; and once
Again the old, dark mystery arose.
But soft and clear the phantom voices said:
"We are the voices of thy starving soul,
O, faithless, still to tarry. Lo, she waits
Beyond the leper's gate."
The linted hands
Of morning twilight rose, and the great bird
Of paradise his opal feathers preened
Beside the singing fountain. Time sped on,
But nevermore beneath the drifting shade
Of wefted palm-trees passed the haunted king.

A wasted form in tattered pilgrim garb
Alone in death lay on the desert sands;
His unshod feet upon the burning path
Had left their crimson mark; and the foul breath
Of loathsome pestilence about him clung.
But on his leprous bosom gleamed a pearl
From out the sea immortal; and a crown
Of purest immortelles, all luminous
With light divine, with fragrant glory crowned
That empty casket of a ransomed soul.

THE BLUE FLOWER.

LIKE the chiming of bells heard in dreams half-remembered,
Their melodies float on the stillness of time,
Those voices of ceaseless, soul-seeking endeavor,
The hunger and pain and the thirsting forever
Of mortals who faint in the desert of life
For unfailing draughts from the fountain sublime.

Hence this legend that lives in the Orient golden—
The quest of the blue fairy flower that brings
To the brow that it blesses a surcease of aching,
And rest unto hearts that are weary to breaking;
For the satisfied calm of the soul evermore
Within this fair blossom has folded its wings.

Hast thou found it? O radiant child of the morning,
Thyself like the grace of a wild brier-rose;
With the clear-seeing eyes of a spirit untainted,
With the warm dimpled mouth where the seraphs have painted
No trace of the world's idle wisdom nor scorning,
By the reed-shadowed rill hast thou found where it grows?

O, woman, whose eyes love-anointed yet linger
On the fair shining heads of thy heart's rosary,
On the soft tender arms which around thee are clinging,
On the joy-birds of home which around thee are singing,
Their unwritten songs of delight evermore,
Hast thou found the blue flower? Does it blossom for thee?

Does it gleam 'midst the snows of the mist-shrouded heights
Of wisdom, O man, where thou standest alone
By the unlettered graves of the seekers, thy brothers,
With thy pitying hands full of healing for others
Whose spirits are worn with the fever of living,
In its redolent balm hast thou strengthened thine own?

Nay, ye seek it in vain where the shadows of death
Enshroud the far heights and embitter each slope;
But its perfume is borne through the half-open portal
That shuts from our longing the city immortal;
And pilgrims far down the deep valleys of sorrow,
Grow strong as they breathe the sweet fragrance of hope.

SONS OF CYDIPPE.

FROM a long-vanished town of ancient Greece,
Engirt with waving palms and olive groves,
This record sprung; and the strong flood of time
Upon its tossing bosom bore to me
An echo of its mournful melody.
In Argos old, a city by the sea,
Within the full sound of its flowing tide,
A mighty temple reared its brazen towers
Against the sun; and hither, with the glow
Of noon-tide came a throng of worshipers.
Slowly the vast procession rolled along
Resistless as the ocean billows' sweep;
And as it neared the temple gate, anon,
A burst of joyous acclamation rose
Above its lofty arches to the skies,
And far away in thrilling echoes died
On the warm breeze that rocked the myrtle boughs.
Behold the cause! Within a chariot, drawn
With toil o'er weary miles, by her two sons,
Cydippe, daughter of an ancient house,
And Juno's favored Priestess, sat.
Her spotless drapery, and unbound hair,
Floated upon the incense-laden breeze;
And the dark splendor of her steadfast eyes

Enwrapped the stalwart figures of her sons,
Biton and Cleobis; those pious youths
Who, when no oxen could be found to draw
Their mother's chariot to the temple gates,
Themselves the service joyously performed.
For this the lofty domes of Argos rang
With acclamations of her populace.

The sacred rites were o'er. Cydippe knelt
Alone, before the altar's holy flame;
And the still rapture on her perfect face
Shone like the moonlight on a far-off lake:
While from her lips a sweet, awed whisper fell.
"'Ask what thou wilt.' Oh, blessed voice that spoke
Those gracious words to my beseeching soul!
Yet, how my full heart trembles with the weight
Of its great joy. What is the promised boon
That I shall claim for them—my pious sons?
For Cleobis, whose gentle nature seeks
Its warmth in loving hearts, the household shrine,
And the calm current of a life beloved,
Were best. But what for him?—my gifted boy
Whose earnest eyes have kindled at the tale
Of conflict, and of glory from a child.
Have not the whispers of ambition thrilled
My feebler pulses with a strange delight?
For him—and yet—if my weak, mortal light
Should err. If I should bring upon my sons
A blight, instead of blessing—Gracious Power,
Thy feeble servant hath not light to choose.

Thou knowest the gift for mortals best. Oh, grant
Thine own best guerdon unto these, my sons."
As sunbeams fall into the ocean's breast,
Fell on her heart the words: "Thy prayer is heard."

Softly the morning light on Argos dawned;
And with its first pale gleam, Cydippe sought
The chamber of her sons. Ah, who was there?
The shadow of an unseen Presence filled
That spacious room, and cast its nameless dread
Upon her soul. "Wearied they do but sleep.
Awake, my sons, it is your mother calls."
They answered not. Without lay Life, rocking
Upon the hollow seas. Within sat Death.

O, ye who stand upon the shores of Time,
And watch the current of relentless Fate,
Bear your hope-freighted barks against the rocks,
Turn from the mournful wreck your yearning gaze,
And bending low above the grassy mounds,
Where in the deep serenity of death,
Lie hearts that nevermore shall throb and ache
With life's great burden of unceasing pain—
Exclaim with thankfulness, "*This is the best.*"

CRICKET SONG.

SOMETIMES when the fire in the grate is low,
When the room lies dim in the crimson glow,
And the grandfather's clock ticks loud and strong,
There's a sound of mirth
On the clean-swept hearth;
The crickets are singing their evening song.

And we sometimes hear through the chorus shrill
The echoing clack of a water-mill;
And the whirring hum of a spinning-wheel
Like a soothing rhyme
Rings a drowsy chime
With the purling sound of a shadowy reel.

From the sunken graves on the hills afar,
Past each rusty bolt, and each crumbling bar
Of the silent land have the old folks come
Through the open door
Of the quaint folklore,
To sit by the fire in their sometime home.

But the firelight shines on no silvered head;
No faltering feet o'er the carpet tread,
And no dim eyes gleam in the fading light,
But their voices strong
In the crickets' song,
We hear in the hush of the passing night.

Ah, welcome them back to the warm, sweet life—
Though pleasant is rest from its wearing strife—
In the form of the crickets brown they come,
When the fire is low,
And the night-winds blow,
To bask in the light of their old-time home.

INDIAN PIPES.

Rondeau.

BEYOND the fields of lowing kine,
Within a solitude divine,
Where drowsy Summer deftly weaves
Her fancies into beechen leaves,
These spirit flowers softly shine
Like waxen tapers on a shrine;
Or vases filled with seeded wine
That some Circean revel grieves,—
In Camden Wood.

I drift across the shadow line
That lies between thy home and mine,
And wrapped in Fancy's silken sleeves,
I find within her charméd sheaves,
O, Fairyland, these elves of thine
In Camden Wood.

AS MEMORY TELLS IT O'ER.

IT is December, and the winds rehearse
The memories of long ago. They send
Their shrilly prophecies against the dread
Cold silences our coming feet shall wake.
On the near hills where fadeless beauty lives
The frozen snow-wreaths lie; and icicles
Are hanging from the wild bird's empty nest
Wind-tossed upon the crab-tree's withered bough.
And like the burden of a heart that bears
Its bitterness alone, the sullen clouds
Hang low and heavily above the earth.
The wood, all frozen to its sapless core,
With naked arms outstretched stands desolate.
No warmth of living heart within its bound
Save in yon hedge where once the brier-rose
Her pink cheek laid against the long, long days,
The crouching rabbit in the shriveled leaves
Nestles his timid palpitating heart.
While from a knotted oak, at intervals,
A fitful knocking sounds muffled and low
And echoless as the sad voice of one
Who sobs and calls beside a sunken grave.
O, soul of mine, with secret care oppressed,
The never-lifting shadows of to-day

Too heavily their arms about us close.
Then turn we gladly from the dreary pane
To these red embers glowing like the heart
Of an unfailing love; and close beside
With folded hands of idleness enforced,
We 'll sit and dream that we have never worn
The crown of thorns that womanhood bestows,
Nor drained the bitter cup her hand hath held.
But with the morning and the meadow grass,
The cool blue violets which grew therein,
The mellow hum of wild bees rifling
The bloomy locusts of their perfumed sweets,
The twitter of bank-swallows on the wands
Of waving willows, and the wordless joy
Of rushing waters, we will breathe again
The airs of childhood's fair enchanted realm,
Long lost to view, to memory still most dear.
Thou art, for aye, eternal, land divine!
Thy verdure grows beside unfailing streams
Whose sources lie upon the happy hills
Sun-bathed forevermore. Euroclydon
Hath not the power to break the frailest link
Of thy white daisy-chains, nor toss adrift
One hovering butterfly or thistledown.
Thy skies are ever cloudless and serene;
Thy joy-birds sing amid the fragrant leaves
In the green forests of perennial May;
And faint and far the elfin voices ring
Of those—the shining ones—whose dimpled feet

Stand fast and sure amid the fadeless bloom
Of drifted springtimes on thy deathless shore.

Who does not love the hallowed soil whereon
His infant feet have trod? his own dear land,
His country and his home. Who has not felt
The bounding pulse of all her heroes thrill
Within his veins, and climbed on stepping-stones
Of their strong souls unto a loftier height?
Who has not felt the wrongs of all her sons
Burn like a living flame within his breast,
And veiled his eyes before the memory
Of all her woes? Whence is the subtle charm?
Is it in vale or hill or rolling stream,
The skies that bend above us, or the waft
Of wingéd winds? Nay, question not; but know
There is a power whose potent spell outlasts
The fleeting years, a hidden cord that draws
Our wand'ring footsteps home from alien shore.

O West Virginia! on thy oak-clad hills
How fair the summer sunlight falls, how swift
And clear the many streams whose music dwells
Within thy narrow vales, where calm content
Sits brooding o'er the humble joys of home!
Thy boast is not thy gracious heritage
Of Old Dominion pride and chivalry—
Though these are much; but in the hardy hands
And lion hearts that won with blood and toil
The freedom of this mountain land beloved,

And to their children gave strong frames, strong minds,
Strong hearts, strong faith, and reverential souls.
He well may pause who from thy peaceful shores
His footsteps turn. Where shall the wanderer seek
Skies in their changeful beauty fair as thine?
Where shall he find more tender hearts or true,
More helpful hands, or rest his weary form
Beside such hospitable warmth as lights
Thy humblest hearth? O, heavily will rest
The mold of other clime upon his grave!

My native hills, from childhood's earliest years
Thy many charms within my heart have fed
The fervent fires of deep, abiding love.
Rough are thy nursing arms, yet strong and true.
Harsh are thy cradle songs, yet he who hears,
To Nature's harmonies attunes his soul,
To her full stature grows; and unto him
Shall come the heritage of truth, of hope,
Of patience, and the scorn of meaner things.

I.

The sloping valley, if indeed, a space,
So narrow could be called a vale, ran down
Between the ridges of uneven hills
Whose bristling crest of oak the lightning's brand,
And sport of wrecking winds alone had marred.
Not half-way up the woodman's ax had rung;
Yet many a stretch of rich dark cornland lay
Around their base, and up each narrow cove
Had crept; while, in and out, green pasture fields
And meadow lands embraced the shining brook,
Whose stream of liquid silver filtered through
The beds of russet leaves on hill-sides spread,
As down from the gray-lichened rock it fell—
A thread of living light most musical—
With its wild call for the beyond; the cry
Which ever finds an echo in the strong,
Impatient heart of youth. And softlier now
Along the dark ravine it quickly fled,
Where slender birches waved their graceful arms,
And hemlock whispers od'rous greeting sent;
Against the convent walls of many a rock
Where pale wake-robins stood like pensive nuns
Nodding their vespers in the cloistered light;
Around the knotted roots of storm-scarred trees

That held the nestlings of the sailing hawk ;
'Neath many a bridge the tossing winds had built,
Within whose hollow arches sleek-soled feet
Of busy squirrels hastened to and fro.

—O, happy bridges, that have never borne
The heavier burden of the anxious soul,
Nor bent beneath the tread of grinding care.
Yet Sorrow's wings are long, their shadows fall
On every spot where throbs life's mystery.—
Last of her race, a trembling fugitive,
The brown doe stayed her flying feet, and hushed
Her panting sobs amid the listening ferns,
And cooled her steaming muzzle in the brook ;
While far below, and faint arose the cry
Of fierce hounds throttling her spotted fawn.
Across the rushing tide the swift gray fox,
In the lone night has borne his gasping prey ;
And there oft-times was heard the plaintive cry
Of downy infants strangled in their nests,
The wail of love bereft and comfortless.

—All this was pictured on the brook, and more ;
For one who learned its song, no matter how,
Has heard within its broken murmurs all
The love and longing of the human heart,
And in its lisping syllables has caught
The wail of an imprisoned soul ; and strange,
Bright visions of eternity has seen
Within its bubbles for an instant gleam.—

On swept the singing brook, and where it checked
Its headlong course beside a hazel copse
Within a hollow where the shadows sat
Muffling their shapeless forms the livelong day,
A row of shallow basins held the cool
Translucent bath of the shy kings of song
Whose haunt is solitude. At twilight hour
This spot was ever still, save for the cry—
One oft-repeated note, low, soft, and long,
Whose ling'ring sweetness could not hide its pain.
Unseen that bird of twilight, and to me
A voice it must remain forevermore.
Then through the narrow meadows crept the brook
With half its music gone, but keeping still
The deep unquiet murmur of regret.
Now purling softly to its willowed shores,
And breaking into smiles on pebbly bars.

—Canst thou not learn, O soul of many cares.
The wisdom of the brook? What were this life
Without the ripple on its shingly bars,
Beneath whose music failing hope grows young,
And timid hearts are bathed in secret strength.—
Then round the tufts of smooth green rushes borne,
The eddying waters glide with whispered sigh
Beneath the shadows of the "daddy-tree."
A giant tree, so old! with rough brown bark
Whose tortuous seams a dizzy highway made
For toiling caravans of busy ants.

Three times the measure of my out-stretched arms
Around its stem a girdle scarcely made;
And scores of merry children might rejoice
Within its circled shadow all day long.
And never mid-day sunshine found the bank
O'er which the twisted branches bent to catch
Their waving shadows in the stream below.
There all day long the jump-up-johnnies held
Their quaint blue aprons full of sparkling gems,
And mocked with subtile breath the questing bee.

—O, sweet blue violets, your long cool stems
Are fit alike for childhood's dimpled hand
To toss in garlands on the flashing wave,
And for the pillow placed by sorrowing love
With tenderest touch beneath undreaming heads—

The great tree loved the brook. Its heavy roots
Crept forth from the black mold, and twisting 'round
In many shapes, grotesque and fanciful,
Fell down in swinging curves into the stream,
A mass of serpents twining in and out
Among the polished stones whose smooth round heads
The shrunken tide at harvest time laid bare
To loitering feet which cross that stream no more.

II.

I ask, O mortal, did you ever stand
In the rose-gardens of the heart, and raise
The crystal vase of pleasure brimming o'er
With creaming liquor to your eager lips,
But that some drop whose potent alchemy
Not all that living sweetness could resist—
One tiny drop from unseen fingers flung
Into the rosy waters—quenched their light,
And left a cold, unpalatable draught
Which to the dregs your shrinking lips must quaff?
You question why. The riddle is as old
As life and love, and they have solved it not.

One cloud alone o'erhung the summer day,
The shadow of a duty. Just beyond
The reaching fingers of the daddy-tree,
The fretted brook went swiftly swirling through
A long-toothed water-gate. To meet the gate,
On either side a heavy fence, secure,
With firm-set stake and lofty rider, stretched
Its zigzag length across from hill to hill.
On one side lay the meadow land, the fields

Of yellow wheat, and waves of silver rye,
With many an emerald stripe of growing corn.
There was the orchard, too, whose ancient trees,
Knotted and gray and ringed about with holes,
Had long outlived the planter's hand.
Unpruned and moss-grown they, but bearing still
Each year a liberal crop of "early sweets,"
On which the pale red streaks were dawning now,
And "mealies," scores of which lay whitening
And softening beneath the tangled grass.
The pasture fields lay on the thither side,
And from them many a wistful glance was cast
Upon the promised land of corn and rye—
The doom of Tantalus in modern guise.—
Two panels wide the gaping portals stood
Through which the creaking loads of grain and hay,
At intervals went lumbering toward the barn,
Followed apace by half the motley crew
Of supplicants, a score of Mordecais
That vexed me daily standing at the gate,
Where I, the keeper of the keys, endowed
With brief authority enforced the law
With willow switches, or with tough, straight stalks
Of last year's ironweed. Unpleasing task
To break the bond of rare good comradeship
With hostile blow. The gentle cows, demure
And sleek, the cherry-sided calves, with round
Bright eyes and budding horns, the frisky colts
That bowed their willing heads in feigned repose

While I the witch-knots in their manes untied,—
Were each and all the children of the same
Green, living earth that was my mother, too.
By twos and threes, then singly still they came
With lingering tread which furtive glance belied,
Cropping the short sweet grass and clover heads,
The tender shoots of shrubs, and spicy weeds
'Circling the open gap, where in a mesh
Of criss-cross shadows slanted from the fence,
A most unwilling despot held her court.
Afar, from out the fields, the ringing clang
Of whetted scythes came mingled with the din
Of locusts rasping on their rusty files,
The clear, sweet calling of "bob-white" from out
His Eldorado of the scattered grain;
And from a steep, rough hill, where 'neath a cairn
Of smooth gray stone, a local chronicle
Some Indian graves had placed, was heard the wail,
Uncertain, low, by mourning wood-doves made;
While from the house, far off upon the bluff,
A singing voice I sometimes faintly heard.

—My sister, many years the turf has lain
Above thy gentle eyes; and though my lips
May seldom speak thy name, yet thou art still
A living presence in my daily life.
It needs not much, a tone, a fancied touch
Like thine, a passing glint of sunny light
On soft, brown hair, a bird-note, or a line

Of some forgotten song—to bring again
The clover-bank, and hum of bees, the breath
Of milky bloom, the girlish form, too frail
To anchor long beside this storm-swept shore,
The cheek too pale, and the mild, steadfast light,—
That far-off look, as if the spirit's gaze
Entranced, dwelt evermore on things beyond
The reach of mortal vision. Thou wast young
And fair for death to claim. But the cold grave
No terrors opened to thy trusting feet
Which guided by the Lamp that failed them not,
Entered the silent land that holds thee yet.
Ah, life had never been for me the gnarled
And tangled skein it is beneath thy hand.
In the lone dusk and silences profound,
From out its wordless deeps of solitude,
My heart, uncomforted, still cries for thee.
And in my utter selfishness I 've longed
To call thee back from out the thither land,
To feel the touch of thy dear tender hands,
And hush the tumult of a nature wild
And turbulent upon thy gentle breast.
Still, when I strive to picture thee within
The daily walks of life that others tread,—
That thou hadst trod, beneficent and just,
Encircled with thy gracious womanhood,—
The forces fail; thou art so far apart
From all the jar of living, the heart wear,
And dreary sense of the unsatisfied

Which like a canker frets us, day by day.
Thou art the morning light of memory,
The rainbow promise of perpetual peace
Beyond the storms of time, where broken sails
Are furled within the harbor bar of home.

III.

And so the long hours widened into bloom.
Like scarlet poppies nodding in the sun
They drowsed to afternoon; and tenantless
The gap lay in the sweltering light. Besieged
And the besiegers both were gone. Content
Among the ashen willow stems, knee-deep
In clear, blue pools the latter stood with calm
Reflective mien; or in the friendly shade
Of elder thickets, canopied and wreathed
With budding clematis and thick swamp vines,
They found a refuge from tormenting flies;
Or in the shadow of the big log barn
They stood and further depredations planned.
The latter? On the lowest curving root
Of the old daddy-tree, just where the voice
Of the loved brook in softest whispers poured
The dole of its sad longing at my feet,
I heard the chiming throbs of Nature's heart,
And learned her cradle-song, though knowing not.

Beneath my feet a school of minnows turned
Their silver sides aslant, and slowly fanned
Their striped fins, and through their rosy gills
The cool sweet waters drew; or darted forth—
A pack of tiny, gray-backed water-wolves—
With gaping mouths to seize the clover head
Which a deceptive hand had tossed adrift.
Beneath them on a bed of tinted stones,
The shadowy crawfish took his backward way;
And water-lizards with their yellow throats
And freckled sides went flirting up and down.
A brave, undoubting Peter, on the waves
With hurried step the long-legged spider walked;
Upon his eight gray feet he surely wore
The seven-league boots of old time fairy lore.
And in an eddy where the light drift lay
The dervish sunfish bugs were whirling 'round.
Adown the stream with coppery head erect,
His shining length in many a graceful curve,
The water-snake on frequent voyage sailed.
I watched him upward raise his slippery folds
From root to root, and glide into the grass
Unharmed. And hither came the dragon-fly
With burnished wings and all-beholding eyes,
A royal courier in green and gold
Who skimmed along the beds of peppermint
And pale pink bergamot, but tarried not.
—Are they not all the King's own messengers
Who fill the world with beauty, and delight

The heart of man with loveliness and grace?—
Upon a log which high spring tide had cast
Upon the bank, a blue-striped lizard baked
His iridescent sides in the hot sun;
While in and out beneath the broken bark
Crept shining beetles with their branching horns
And bead-like eyes; and shrillest chirpings came
Unceasingly from the loose stone-heaps near,
Where colonies of black wood-crickets lived;
Some steps beyond, the deft field-spider sat
Spinning her nets beneath a filmy tent.
Above her in the hot and quivering air
The tireless midges danced a dizzy jig.
Upon a hollow stump the flick-up spread
His golden wings, and shook his scarlet crest
With energetic raps—the passing bell
Of many a hapless worm. While on the fence
In mock solemnity's ill-fitting garb,
Marauding crows a noisy council held,
And shook the rainbows from their glossy plumes,
And eyed with sidewise glance the tender corn.
All lazily the hawk his circles wheeled
At dizzy height in skies of cloudless blue,
So far away his fierce scream ruffled not
The calm of brooding birds within their nests;
And where belated heads of elder-bloom
Above the shelving bank hung motionless,
There faintly rose the intermittent croon
Of resting bees that murmured drowsily

And shook the gold of elfland from their wings.
Into the brook each loosened petal fell
And on the shining wave, like sweet Elaine,
All pale and fair to Camelot floated on.

—Ah, dear dream-city of the heart, beyond
Our searching gaze thy shining temples rise.
Our reaching hands, our calling voices vain;
But some day, in the dim, uncertain light,
All cold and dumb we shall go floating down
To thy white gates. There royal fame, perchance,
And pitying love will come, and gazing long
The record of some tender grace may find,
And give us knightly greeting, at the last.—

Beneath the tree, upon the cool, soft grass
At ease reclined, I watched the onward flow
Of shining waters, till the stream asleep
Within its narrow bed did seem to lie,
And far away the droning voices grew,
As all the summer land and I fled on.

—Of Fairyland the skies are ever fair,
And softly all its fragrant breezes blow.
Within the oak-tree's ringéd heart the hall
With rosy splendor shone. Waïst-deep in waves
Of purple bloom the bold musicians stood;
And from each jeweled heart and golden flute
The haunting melodies of Elfland rang,

And like a cloud of airy thistle-down
All soft and light, the elfin dancers sped.
Then forth his witching bride Prince Charming led.
Her sandaled feet were white as cherry bloom.
A fretted rainbow clad her lissome form;
And in her happy eyes that looked on him
The tender grace of love's bright morning shone.
The spirit of the sun was in her hair,
And music's mystery and dear delight
Like hidden nightingales sang in her voice,
While faint and far the listening echoes rang.
I watched—
But what is this? In sudden whirl
Of glancing lights and din of swift, bright blades,
The revel sank; and gone were they, the hall,
The prince, the lady fair. Through surging waves
Of veiling mist a gleaming shape uprose,
And nearer came the tread of stealthy feet,
And—Could it be? It was. In frantic haste
A Devon heifer cropped the juicy corn;
And on her footsteps came a lawless rout,
The eaters of forbidden fruit, which I
Must straightway banish with a willow wand.
All in good season, too, for yonder came
A groaning freight by patient oxen drawn,
Whose whistling driver slouched his bandless hat,
And showered epithets of ire and scorn
Upon the plodding creatures at his side.
Along his path the milkweeds headless grew;

The brooding sparrow chirped in dire distress,
And for his life the striped squirrel fled
Into the stone-heap near; and knowing cows
About the gap, discreetly walked away.
But I half guiltily drew near and scanned
With calculating eyes the approaching form
Whose sagging pockets never empty were.
All things they held, from baby terrapins,
Kidnaped upon the hills, mud-turtles wee,
With scalloped shells, snake eggs and squirrel teeth,
Sweet-knots torn from the beech, and shining bits
Of phosphorescent wood, sharp arrow-heads,
Canoes of poplar bark, and whistles shrill
Of smooth white walnut made—to fairer freight
Of apples and red plums, hill grapes and nuts,
Adam-and-Eves with white and gluey bulbs,
And bluebell roots found on the way to mill.—
All these, in turn, found favor in my eyes.
But memory of a thousand teasing pranks
Some caution lent, and tempered the replies
To autocratic questionings like these:
"Where have you been?" "No place." "Then, where were you
When I came through the gap, two hours ago?"
"Why—sitting in the shadow, over there."
"Then why did you not answer when I called?"
"I—didn't hear. I wasn't listening."
"You've been *asleep!*" "I *haven't;* no, indeed,
I was just *thinking* in the shade." "O, ho!

You look like you'd been thinking pretty hard.
But not an apple have I for a girl
Who thinks too hard to answer when I call,
I think I shall just feed them to the calves."
"Well, I don't really, for certain, know"—
"Own up, you were asleep." "*Maybe* I was
Asleep for just a minute, but no more."
No further conference; observant eyes
Afar had seen the loitering team, and clear
Admonitory words came o'er the field.
And startled by a swift vindictive jerk,
Against the creaking bows the oxen leaned
Their bulky weight, and with reluctant tread
Moved onward toward the bark; nor unconsoled
Was left the greedy guardian of the gap.

—Minding the gaps of life's wide harvest field,
I watch the reapers in the clear noon light
Binding the golden sheaves. No idler, there,
Art thou, my brother; faithfully and well
Thy hands have toiled, and never heart more brave
And true the burden of the weary day
Unshrinkingly hath borne.

The hopes of youth
Like flocks of singing birds in summer lanes,
Through sheen and shade flit onward joyously.
On every side there shines a beacon light,
And every pathway leads to fairer heights.

But step by step, we find the hidden snares,
The sleeping lions rouse; and soon our hearts
Have grown familiar to the touch of pain,
And her black garments shadow all our steps.
Then he alone is great who pausing not
To count the graves of his departed joys,
Moves onward in the bare, unlovely path
Where Duty beckons him, and looks not back.
O, thou veiled Spirit, though thy clasp is cold,
And thy voice stern and harsh, the way is firm
And safe beneath the feet where thou dost lead.
Within thy footprints lies a secret strength;
From thy white garments healing odors waft,
And he alone is blest who follows thee.—

IV.

The day grew old; and gentle silence laid
Her finger on the pulsing harp of life.
Asleep within his den of polished stones
The darting craw-fish lay. The whirr and hum
Of busy insect life grew strangely still.
By twos and threes the solemn crows went home
To the deep woods, whence rose the waking sigh
Of night winds dreaming in their spicy lair;
And fast the rising shadows chased the sun
From point to point, until the last red gleam

On tip-toe stood upon the highest rock.
And twilight soon o'er all the valley lay.
But still the creaking loads went lumbering by,
And still more wistful glances followed them.
Open the gap remained. And now strange sounds
From out the copse above the orchard field—
A low, foreboding cry, uncertain, sad,
And ghostly chatterings, and shivering moans,
Through every nerve uncanny crawlings sent.
An owl? Why, yes; of course, a harmless owl,
With speckled breast and soft fur-booted feet.
And yet—might it not be some gruesome thing
With fleshless limbs in winding garments wrapped?
For sunken graves were on the narrow bluff
Where first the climbing hill sat down to rest.
And startled memory sped on rapid wing
To stories told beside the blazing fires
On winter nights, when from the clearings came
The hired men, and each with chair atilt,
And brimming over with the triple joy
Of rest and food and warmth, rehearsed each dark
And ghoulish mystery that "Pap" had seen,
That "Granny" dreampt, or "Uncle Dave" had heard.
Ah, never silver tongue of saint or sage
Such breathless listener had. I speak for one
On clean-cleft logs of hickory and beech
Against the ample chimney-rock curled up,
A chubby Cinderella, dreaming not

Of ball nor coming prince; but with a great
Capacity for tales of yawning graves,
Of grinning bones, and pale, sulphuric lights,
Who listening sat with slowly rising hair.
The roasting apple on its wooden legs
Careened and fell unheeded to the hearth
And in the leaden ashes sputtering lay.
The tempting rivulets of sticky sweet
Untasted from the hickory forestick fell;
And the forgotten crickets vainly chirped
Beside the jamb for the accustomed crumbs.
The crackling myriads of shining sparks
Up the wide-throated chimney swiftly flew,
And no one thought to wish that they were showers
Of golden dollars, all her very own.
And when the covered embers smoldered low
On the deserted hearth, with head beneath
The close-drawn counterpane, what horrid sights
The dreaming eyes still saw, of headless men
In bloody shrouds arrayed, who joined the throng
Of grinning skeletons in dizzy whirl;
Of icy, strangling hands that ever strove
To drag the covers from the trundle-bed;
Of fiendish revelries of witch and ghoul
Which scarce the welcome light of dawn dispelled.

How fast the shadows thicken, and how near,
O, dear! how very near the ghostland lies.
For had not old Aunt Katy seen arise

From yonder very spot a flaming ball
Whose baleful light turned midnight into day,
And heard a hollow rattle as of clods
Upon the lids of empty coffins cast,
While close beside the window howled the dog
Because he heard the unquiet dead astir?
And why might not some dread unsightly thing
Whose bones no marrow hold, wand'ring in search
Of missing records or ill-gotten pelf
By some perverse, mistaken fate find *me?*
But not alone, O, no! With flying feet
Into the pasture, through the hated gap
I fled, where in the dusk the cattle stood,
Their sleek sides heaving with the placid sighs
Of restful rumination. Close beside
A speckled beauty crouching, O what joy
To feel the smooth sharp horns, and softly stroke
The tuft of curling hair between her eyes
To smell the rich-weed, and the late sweet growth
Of clover in her steamy breath, and feel
The friendly grating of her slender tongue
Around my fingers o'er and o'er again;
And in this dumb companionship to lose
My useless terrors, and the dead forget.

—Ah, poor forgotten dead! For you there lives
An aching pity deep within my heart.
Your little world lay in the gentle bounds
Of those encircling hills. Your brawny arms

From the unbroken wild those meadows won.
With patient labor, day by day, you wrought
The homely texture of your quiet lives,
Waiting the summons to the silent land.
Whether at dawn the golden bowl is rent,
Or pitcher broken at the noon fount lies,
Or in the closing dusk the silver cord
Is gently loosened from its earthly stay—
The messenger is sure; we must obey.
To sightless eye and palsied frame of age
Welcome the refuge of the friendly tomb;
And childhood with one brief, regretful sigh
Its wondering eyes close in the dreamless sleep—
So slight the threads which bind it to the earth.
But weep for them—thy children, pitying earth,
Who in the royal vigor of their days,
While sweet the million-throated ecstasies
Of living sang in every thrilling nerve,
The summons heard; and with reluctant feet
Leaving the tender warmth of light and love
The dreary threshold of oblivion crossed.
For them on Fame's far height no watch-light shone,
Their humble names her clarion voice ne'er breathed,
Nor yet in song or story lives their tale;
Yet these were theirs—the ministering hand
And watchful eye of love, the hope of life
Beyond the darkness with the risen Christ.
Not long, ye silent ones, the voice of love
Outside those dreary lodgings called to you.

Forgotten are your very names. The roots
Of sturdy saplings feast upon your mold;
So thick they stand, entwined with clasping vines
And thorny brambles, that the bounding hare
Beneath them seeks a covert from her foe.
Here, in the early spring the budding shoots
Of hickory unfold their scarlet sheaths,
The sassafras its yellow fringes shake,
And shy, sweet flowers bow their tinted heads.
Here in the autumn noon the sumac flaunts
Its fiery banner in the hazy light,
The golden-rod its lavish riches spread,
And palest asters hail the passing year.
And does it matter that no crumbling stone
Remains your brief memorial to bear?
The earth lies in the hollow of His hand;
The humblest dust its bosom can not hide
From quickening light of Resurrection morn.—

Beneath the soft wings of the starry night
The weary world had crept. Within the house
The lights were out, and gentle shadows wove
Their subtle ministries above the lids
Of sleeping eyes. Outside upon the step
The watch-dog stretched his brindled length
In fitful slumberings. The whippoorwill
From the far hill his plaintive greeting sent,
And crooning voice of waters answered him;
All else was still.

The dream is dead. Low in the western sky
The dark clouds lighten, and the sun looks forth.
Across the hills his rosy banners trail
The written promise of a fairer dawn.
No winding sheet is this soft covering
Beneath whose kindly cloak the hearts of bloom
Are throbbing warm and strong. The winds are dead;
And in the hush I seem to hear the voice
Of birds that shake their downy wings and call
Within the crab-tree's boughs of fragrant pink.
And deep within this frozen solitude
I know the veiled Life lies as if in sleep,
Her pale hands clasping close her silken vest,
Her lips all cold and motionless; but soft
And warm her gentle heart is beating yet;
And through the closéd lids her dreaming eyes
Look upward for the dawn. And shalt not thou,
O, doubting soul of man, look upward, too?

THE CHIEFTAIN'S BURIAL.

WHOSE silent forms beneath the dim
Uncertain stars of midnight tread
The winding river's solemn shore,
Bearing the pale uncoffined dead?
The primal forest's vaulted gloom
Receives within its purple breast

The cautious steps of those who bear
The chieftain to his dreamless rest
In that deep stream whose ceaseless surge
Alone shall be his funeral dirge.

No rolling mass nor requiem
In choral harmonies arise,
Nor measured beat of muffled drum
Upon the wakeful night wind sighs;
Yet mournfully the heavy dew
Its murmur drops from leaf to leaf
And mingles with the bitter tears
Of deep and unavailing grief,
Expressed in many a stifled sigh
From man's unspoken agony.

From the wide, bannered halls afar
There comes no whisper of the home
Where loving hearts shall long await
The footsteps that shall never come.
Yet, swell thy harmonies, O Fame,
August achievement's fitting meed.
Who in the triumph of a world
Will reck of hearts that break or bleed?
Who 'neath progression's blazing beam
Will mourn a woman's broken dream?

A deeper shadow on the stream,
A circling wave that drifted wide,
A broken prayer, and then, alone
The sullen moaning of the tide.

No mark to show where those who wept
Again may pause to drop a tear;
Yet Glory sits with folded wings
Beside that hero's sepulcher
Whose mighty current's ceaseless song
Still rolls his memory along.

HEPATICA.

THROUGH changing time, year after year,
At the old tryst thou meet'st me here,
Sweetheart, thyself unchanged and fair
With brave true eyes and fringy hair,
And evanescent, strange perfume
Enwrapped within thy tinted bloom.

The kindly forests well did keep
The secret of thy winter sleep,
And russet coverlet it spread
With loving hand above thy head.
Through the long night this sturdy tree
A faithful watch kept over thee.

And ere the blue-bird's glancing wing
Announced the coming of the spring,
Again to fairer beauty born,

Thou art risen on this Easter morn
In the wild March when singing shrill
The storm-winds break against the hill.

But yesterday I brought to thee
A child's heart beating high and free,
A footstep swift as swallow's flight,
A child's unquestioning delight,
And all the strange bright hopes that rise
Like singing birds 'neath April skies.

But yesterday the shining rill
Came laughing from the craggy hill;
So near, so clear its voices seem
The hollow years are but a dream
That slowly weaves its shadowy bands
About the Springtime's flowery lands.

The weary brain, the heart of care
In thy grave-clothes are buried there;
And in the chill March Easter morn
Again, within my bosom born
The child-soul rises joyously,
Hepatica, to welcome thee.

AT THE SPRING.

"DRINK, O drink and come again!"
Bending with the crystal cup
Where the water bubbled up
From its subterranean den,

In the spring-tide of the year,
Yellow down on every thing,
Bursting bud and callow wing—
Friend of mine, your voice I hear,

Resting here beside the spring
While the merry-hearted rout
Wandering the wood about
Hither all their treasures bring.

Fringes of the maiden-hair,
Pale wood-lilies, dainty bells
Rifled from the secret dells,
Mosses, ferns and lichens rare.

Song and laughter every-where;
Merry jest and quick reply,
Gentle greeting wafted by
On the blue-tinged mountain air.

Come again? Ah, nevermore!
Still, maybe thine earnest eyes
Now look down from Paradise
On this spot beloved of yore.

HUNTING THE COWS.

WE crossed the creek above the mill;
And where the footpath climbed the hill

We turned to watch the water-wheel
Forever like a giant reel

Winding the silvery waters bright
In tangled skeins of broken light,

And listen to the whirring sound
With which the mighty burrs went 'round;

While powdered white from crown to sole
The honest miller took his toll.

Gone is the miller; 'neath the hill
His kindly heart lies cold and still;

His busy wife, so hale and fair,
In silence rests beside him there.

We saw the martins dip and skim
Along the water's rippled brim,

And like a flash of purple light
Vanish in clouds of dazzling white.

We loitered in the steep ravine
On fragrant tufts of softest green ;

And plucked wild cherries in the shade
The wide, fruit-ladened branches made ;

Then paused upon the brushy slope
To cut a grapevine skipping-rope.

Low in the west the sinking sun
A million golden cobwebs spun,

As upward by the winding ways
We followed his ascending rays,

Still gathering treasures old and new
Till sagging pockets heavy grew.

Then weary with the bootless quest
We sat down on the hill to rest.

Upon a dark-ringed stump we spread
Our treasure-trove, and gayly said :

"We'll leave them here, to-night, and then
On some day soon, we'll come again."

Ah, sweet Some-day! within it lies
Enshrouded from all mortal eyes

More riches than the world can hold,
The joys this life may not unfold.

It seems so near; it lies so far,
Its dawn is golden as the star

That leads the martial host on high.
"Dear Fate, be merciful," we cry.

"Not yet—too soon," her voice replies.
A moment, then, "Too late," she sighs.

The katydids were piping shrill,
And through the woodland crept a chill,

And spirit-fingers in the vales
Were weaving twilight's purple sails.

We heard the birches' whispered sigh,
The bird-of-evening's plaintive cry;

And faintly from the darkest dell,
The welcome jingle of a bell.

But frowning in the darkened wood
A host of giant shadows stood;

And silent now with secret dread
Adown the hill we swiftly sped,

While fast upon the stirring wind
The Erl-king followed close behind.

The Great Bear rolled his shining eyes
Upon us from the bended skies,

And from the west the crescent moon
O'er lucky shoulder cast her boon,

When weary with our wanderings late
We stood beside the milking-gate.

THE END.

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